2020

Faith Leaders Strategies for Increasing Millennial Engagement

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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MBA, University of Colorado, 2005

BS, University of Arizona, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Faith based organizations (FBOs) have failed to engage their millennial members at the same level they have engaged the previous generations. FBO leaders who fail to engage millennials are at risk of not fulfilling their mission. Grounded in the value cocreation model, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies FBO leaders used to engage millennials successfully. The participants comprised 7 leaders from 3 Western U.S. FBOs who have implemented successful strategies to engage millennials. Data were collected from interviews, observations, and online and offline documentation. The data were analyzed using Miller's guide to thematic analysis, and 4 themes emerged: create a sense of belonging and family in welcoming, supportive environments; remain open to innovating practices that keep the church Christ-centered; build relationships that extend beyond the church; and empower and equip people in their faith, in their life, and as leaders. A key recommendation for practitioners is to dedicate staff to understanding millennials in their various life stages—single professionals, young newlyweds, and growing families—so that practitioners adapt their strategies according to millennials' needs as the millennials mature. The implications for positive social change include the potential for FBO leaders to engage millennials, enabling FBOs to extend missions to new communities, increase the longevity of their social ministries, and enhance community well-being through a variety of social programs.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to all souls who thirst for God (see John 4:14; Psalm 42:1-2; Psalm 63:1). God knows you, but do you know God? As a devout Lutheran, I undertook a journey of deepening my knowledge of God and His love for us through Jesus. That journey was one of sacrifice, love, pain, and grace that I would not have finished if it were not for Jesus's constant presence. One does not go on a journey alone, however. Therefore, I also dedicate this to my loved ones.

Acknowledgments

I am not a quitter, but God knows this. I am deeply committed to my faith and felt Jesus's comforting guidance throughout every step of this journey. However, God called me to this journey and helped me through it by providing people who represented beacons of support and timely guidance along the way. My husband always reminded me of the importance of balance when I wanted to skip church so that I could work on school—the irony being that, although my desire was to miss a sermon, that very sermon ended up quenching my soul for the next mile. My kids understood my dedication, saying I was in 20th grade, yet they missed me as I missed them and the valuable moments we lost together. My mom made sure I sought clarification on comments that left me unsure, or she knew my soul would remain unsettled. My pastor and his family served as sounding boards for many thoughts throughout the study; also, he sent me many articles he found relevant to my research. Members in my congregation prayed for me, offered our family grace, and extended us fellowship as I showed up exhausted to events; other times, they would pick up my children so they would not miss their faith studies. Finally, I am grateful for a knowledgeable, challenging, faith-filled, and understanding doctoral chair. His guidance has eased parts of this journey that would have been immeasurably more difficult without his calming words and his swift actions in times of need. Thank you always for the prayers and encouraging words.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

American Protestant faith-based organizations (FBOs) have experienced declining participation by adults, especially millennials. Millennials have prayed less and attended worship services less often than previous generations did at the same age (Twenge, Sherman, Exline, & Grubbs, 2016). Moody and Reed (2017) suggested that American millennials have chosen to disaffiliate from evangelical congregations because of dissatisfaction with their church's judgmental approaches to teaching the Gospel. Unsure of how their religion can support their lives, some millennials may question their religion to the point of dissatisfaction and leave their church (Puffer, 2018). Other millennials may participate in FBOs because of their psychological need to belong, yet they remain of lukewarm faith (Manglos, 2013). Leaders need to consider these mindsets when strategizing to engage millennials better.

In thriving churches, leaders take their participants' needs into account and innovate practices to meet them (Bloom, 2016; Grandy & Levit, 2015; Powell, Mulder, Griffin, & Greenway, 2017; Thiessen, Wong, McAlpine, & Walker, 2019). Leaders of thriving FBOs have met millennials where they are physically, emotionally, and spiritually as they grow through their life stages (Powell et al., 2017). The leaders foster these relationships in respectful response to millennials' doubting habits (Puffer, 2018), often outside of traditionally observed "Sunday Christianity" (McDowell, 2018). To engage their members, especially millennials, FBO leaders need to learn to understand them and offer them active roles in the church. Members' involvement in the leadership and design of a variety of activities has cultivated a sense of belonging, a culture of

community, and shared leadership—all of which represent key tenets of value cocreation, or VCC (Grandy & Levit, 2015), the framework within which this study has found some answers.

Background of the Problem

American Protestant FBOs, inclusive of churches and religious charities, have struggled to engage millennials, born in the last 2 decades of the 20th century. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), millennials were the largest generation at 27.2% of the population, and they had the most significant potential to drive the future viability of organizations. Churches need people to participate and contribute to sustain their operations and missions (A. Chan, Fawcett, & Lee, 2015). However, Americans have grown less religious since the 1970s (Twenge et al., 2016) through reduced attending and giving practices in churches (Osili, Clark, & Bergdoll, 2016). At least 73% of college-aged millennials in the early 2010s had attended religious activities, but their involvement levels were lower compared to the 88% of young adults who did so in the early 1970s (Twenge, Exline, Grubbs, Sastry, & Campbell, 2015). Also, millennials had considered religion significantly less important to their lives than previous generations did at the same age (Twenge et al., 2015). Many adults, having left their churches, eventually return when marrying or having children (Denton & Uecker, 2018; Schleifer & Chaves, 2017). However, millennials have delayed these milestones until later in life (McLeigh & Boberiene, 2014), thus creating concern among FBO leaders as to whether they will return to churches as previous generations did. Some millennials have disaffiliated from religion as an institution (M. Chan, Tsai, & Fuligni, 2015), instead

expressing their faith privately (Salas-Wright, Vaughn, & Maynard, 2015), outside of religious institutions. Such departure creates significant management concerns for churches (Waters & Bortree, 2012). Without millennial engagement, the limited number of volunteers for FBO ministry support and financial giving would affect community service and future viability. Although most churches have youth programming, such programs have failed to support young adults through major life decisions: finding a home, marrying, becoming a parent, and starting a job (Powell et al., 2017). Therefore, FBO leaders must consider how to engage millennials effectively, because millennials' declining religiosity, participation, and contributions have negatively affected FBOs.

Problem Statement

Despite an interest in supporting social causes and increasing cause awareness (Adams & Pate, 2015), millennials, born in the last 2 decades of the 20th century, lack engagement with religious organizations and continue to grow in religious disaffiliation (Reed, 2016). According to a survey by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), 26.9% of people aged 16 to 34 volunteered for religious organizations compared to 35.6% of people aged 35 and over from September 2014 to September 2015. The general business problem is that some FBOs are negatively affected by a lack of millennial engagement in terms of active involvement in religiously affiliated programs and causes, resulting in reduced ability to fulfill their missions. The specific business problem is that some FBOs' leaders lack strategies to engage millennials.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that FBO leaders used to engage millennials. The population for the study was seven leaders in three FBOs that have implemented successful strategies for engaging millennials. The geographical location was the Western United States. The implications for positive social change for FBOs that engage millennials include the potential for FBOs' missions to expand through outreach to additional local, regional, national, or global communities. Some FBOs with increased millennial engagement might garner resources to help social ministries' longevity, enable FBO mission extension to new community populations, and thus enhance the community well-being through a variety of social programs.

Nature of the Study

Research methods available for researchers to use in studies include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies (Crane, Henriques, & Husted, 2018). The selection of a research method requires considering the research objective, the approach to theory development, and underlying philosophical values (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). A qualitative method was the most appropriate choice for this study. A qualitative method is appropriate when exploring the meaning given to a phenomenon through participants' value-laden context and experiences (Sarma, 2015); researchers analyze the phenomenon using a variety of data collection techniques and procedures (Yin, 2018). It was an excellent choice for this study because I explored leaders' experiences and the value-laden context to understand a phenomenon.

Alternatively, a quantitative method is appropriate for measuring relationships between variables and testing hypotheses (Sarma, 2015; Wahyuni, 2012); researchers incorporate controls with highly structured techniques when collecting data and analyzing relationships between variables (Sarma, 2015). However, I did not intend to identify variables and measure their relationships through testing hypotheses; therefore, a quantitative approach was inappropriate for this study. A mixed-methods study allows researchers to implement a blend of both qualitative and quantitative methods, reducing the inherent weaknesses of the individual methods but requiring more time to complete than a qualitative or quantitative approach (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). A mixed-methods approach was not ideal for this DBA study because of time considerations and because I did not seek to measure relationships between variables.

Research designs for an exploratory qualitative study include (a) case study, (b) phenomenology, (c) narrative, and (d) ethnography (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). A case study design was the most appropriate choice for this study because of the need for multiple data sources to explore strategies within the organization-specific context that multiple FBO leaders used to engage millennials. In case studies, researchers collect multiple types of data to provide an in-depth exploration, explanation, or description of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018); no source has a dominant advantage over other types, but each source has benefits that allow a researcher to triangulate data and corroborate findings (Yin, 2018). In a phenomenology design, researchers explore phenomena through participants' lived experiences, such as deep emotions, mood, and sensations (Wilson, 2015) and collect data through interviews to

understand participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Because I intended to determine strategies leaders used to increase millennial engagement, I chose to use multiple data sources, a practice Yin (2018) noted as a requirement for case study design. Phenomenology was not ideal for this study because of its focus on data collection through interviews alone to explore what an experience means for participants.

Researchers use narrative inquiries to explore a person's biography, a historical event, or a sequence of events through participants' experiences (Petty et al., 2012). I did not use a narrative inquiry because this study was not an examination of a historical phenomenon through interviews. Researchers use ethnography to understand people's shared beliefs, languages, and behavior within their cultural context through interviews and observation over an extended timescale (Petty et al., 2012). As a single investigator, however, the extended time commitment made ethnography unsuitable for this study, and my focus was not on culture but on leaders' strategies for engaging millennials across multiple organizations.

Research Question

The central research question was as follows:

RQ: What strategies do FBOs' leaders use to engage millennials?

Interview Questions

Considering that millennials, born in the last 2 decades of the 20th century, continue to age, and they compose the largest U.S. generation, the following questions applied:

1. Describe your role in your nonprofit's outreach programs to engage millennials. In FBOs, engagement occurs on a continuum and represents people's increasing involvement and commitment to an organization's mission and programs: first visits; repeat visits; contributions of time, money, goods, or services; recruiting others; and encouraging engagement from others.
2. What strategies do you or other leaders in the organization use to increase millennial engagement?
3. What strategies and tools assist you in relationships with millennials?
4. How does your organization measure or otherwise assess the success of programs in terms of millennial engagement?
5. What programs do you find work best for helping millennials to experience in-person engagement with other people inside or outside the organization?
6. What types of programs do you find work best for increasing millennial activity and participation within the organization? What makes those types of programs work well?
7. What programs, if any, did you stop offering or change because meaningful and valuable interactions among millennials and with the organization decreased or never occurred?
8. What influence do millennial engagement and the organization's relationship with millennials have on the success of your organization?

9. What additional information would you like to share about how you or your organization engage with millennials?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this study was the VCC model. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) introduced *value co-creation* in the marketing industry. Following are the key principles of VCC:

- Value depends on human experiences.
- Experience derives from interactions with others.
- Organizations facilitate cocreated value through interactions on engagement platforms.
- Cocreation is the process from which mutually expanded value results, and people derive value according to their meaningful and productive human experiences on engagement platforms (Ramaswamy, 2011).

The VCC tenets of mutual exchanges and experiences align with an FBO leader's need to define strategies to engage millennials and maintain the nonprofit mission. The VCC model applied to this study because value depends on what individuals derive according to their meaningful experiences and interchanges between FBO leaders, staff, members, and nonmembers as contributors to the mission. Leaders in FBOs fostered opportunities for mutually beneficial exchanges when pursuing their missions and offering engagement opportunities that aligned with millennials' interests. The result of mutual exchanges included increased or enhanced millennial engagement, value the FBOs received, and

services provided to the community. My comprehension of the VCC tenets helped me to understand leaders' strategies to engage millennials.

Operational Definitions

The terms below are specific to this study and help readers understand key ideas involved in exploring strategies FBO leaders use to engage millennials.

Engagement: Engagement represents the frequency of church attendance, active participation in services or programming activities, and the degree in which the importance of religion in a person's life influences a strengthening commitment to the church (Forbes & Zampelli, 2014) through a willingness to bring others or become a leader of activities.

Engagement platforms: Engagement platforms are where organizations develop cocreative experiences with stakeholders, and these platforms may exist virtually on social media or physically in meeting places to design and innovate, iteratively and continuously, the interactions and experiences of mutual value (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010).

Faith-based engagement: Engagement in faith-affiliated programming and social ministry outreach stems from attitudes, emotions, and intentional behaviors rooted in a sense of belonging, identity, and passion for the organization's mission (Kang, 2016).

Missional: Churches with a missional focus consider the health of their growth through outward service to their communities; in contrast to churches that focus on growth in membership and attendance, churches with a missional focus recognize that

transformation occurs through personal, social, and divine (beyond human quantitative measures) influences in their organizational success (Thiessen et al., 2019).

Religiosity: Religiosity represents the interrelated degrees to which religion is important in a person's life, the belief in a supreme being, exclusive belief in a doctrinal faith, and formalized belief through private and public faith practices (Pearce, Hayward, & Pearlman, 2017).

Religious practices: Religious practices comprise private (prayer, meditation, and reading the dominant book of a person's faith) and public (participation and attendance in religious services and programming) traditions associated with expressing faith (Twenge et al., 2016).

Sense of belonging: In a faith-based context, a sense of belonging represents the feeling that results from people's engagement in the congregation's community life and activities to develop relationships and trust; then, through their frequent attendance, interactions with trusted people help to solidify their social identity, strengthen their faith, and develop their desire to be counted as belonging (Thiessen et al., 2019).

Value cocreation: Value

> co-creation is the process by which mutual value is expanded together [with organization and participant], where value to participating individuals is a function of their experiences, both their engagement experiences on the platform, and productive and meaningful human experiences that result. (Ramaswamy, 2011, p. 195)

Value codestruction: Value codestruction is the direct or indirect interactional process between two entities that results in at least one of the entity's declining well-being because of intentional or unintentional misuse of either entity's resources (Plé & Cáceres, 2010).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions represent truths accepted by the researcher without supporting evidence (Ellis & Levy, 2009). Researchers' assumptions influence how they pursue their study, to include probing the literature, collecting evidence, analyzing data, and presenting findings (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). Assumptions are researchers' attempts to understand human behavior, people's perceptions of the nature of the world, and their communications with others (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). My first assumption was that leaders would understand the questions I asked, prompt for clarifications as needed, and provide truthful responses. My second assumption was that my selection of questions was appropriate to gathering informative answers to the research question. The third assumption was that I would be able to corroborate information from the collected data using the intended approach to data analysis, thus discerning successful strategies for engaging millennials specific to each FBO's context.

Limitations

Limitations represent potential weaknesses specific to a study that the researcher cannot control or eliminate (Connelly, 2013). The first limitation was that I had to rely on the information (documentation and interview responses) I received from FBOs.

Religious organizations have reduced Internal Revenue Service (IRS) filing requirements, and much of their financial information is not available publicly from IRS databases (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2018). In addition, some FBO leaders did not have current documentation to share on the topic. Diefenbach (2009) identified that interviewees represent a source of bias, providing potentially unreliable information.

The second limitation also concerned data collection. Because I was the sole researcher in this study, there was potential for bias. I was responsible for all data collection and analysis. I would not have been able to conduct observations of two events if they had occurred simultaneously, and that could have limited data collection. Given these limitations, in Section 2 I discuss ways I mitigated, though not eliminated, my potential biases.

Delimitations

Delimitations represent the scope of the study and define its boundaries (Ellis & Levy, 2009). There were three delimitations in this study. The first was the focus on American Protestant churches in the Western United States, their programs for serving the community, and their connected ministries, all of which make up a sector of Christian FBOs. Other religions and geographic regions were outside the scope of this study because American Protestant FBO leaders' views may not represent those of other religions or of Protestant leaders in other regions. The second delimitation was the study's purview of millennial engagement that occurred only as guided by FBO leaders' strategies regarding activities or programs, people, or other mission outreach areas. However, FBO leaders may not always document their strategies (Jacobs & Polito,

2012). Thus, I collected data to determine strategies for millennial engagement, understanding that engagement may have occurred coincidentally to leaders' strategies that were not specific to millennials. The third delimitation was that, although FBO leaders might have other concerns, I addressed only millennial engagement.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings may be of value to FBO leaders who seek to increase millennial engagement and ensure the organization's future viability through strategic and programmatic planning. Faith-based organizations that lack millennial engagement might have the reduced ability to fulfill their missions because of diminished millennial support to social outreach programs that help community causes. Program participation might depend on a person's life stage (Carr, King, & Matz-Costa, 2015); therefore, FBO leaders must consider millennials' needs as millennials mature through various milestones of adulthood (e.g., homeownership, marriage, parenthood, employment status) that constrain or restrain their resources for program participation.

An FBO leader's challenge is to learn strategies to engage a generation that is less likely to visit religious organizations than other types of organizations. Millennials are less religiously oriented and exhibited a sharper decline in religiosity for public and private religious practices than other generations did at the same life stage (Twenge et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016). Through remaining open to innovating their practices, FBO leaders might gain millennial commitment, participation, engagement, and donations because of millennials' identification with secular parts of U.S. culture instead of

nonsecular aspects. By including community members in organizational learning and strategic planning processes, an FBO shows members their value to the organization, and the FBO receives members' support (Ridings, 2015). A contribution to business practice includes strategy considerations for mission sustainment that ensure future FBO viability. The results of this study might help FBO leaders to innovate their programming by creating new strategies or building on existing ones with current and potential members to sustain the social pursuit of FBO missions.

Implications for Social Change

The extent of positive social change from engaging millennials in FBOs varies and depends on the organizational mission. Faith-based organizations that cocreate value with members, staff, and nonmembers contribute to the welfare of local communities through improving refugee family placement and support (Ray, 2018), community-based elder care (Yamasaki, 2015), and soup kitchen functioning (Hosseini, 2017), for example. An individual and organization benefit from altruistic activities. Individual motivations for contributing vary and range from seeking prestige to receiving a warm glow (Andreoni, 1990; Mainardes, Laurett, Degasperi, & Lasso, 2016), and society benefits from a contributor's actions, monies, or goods. As a contributor to societal well-being, millennials assist FBOs by showing interest in fixing social problems and improving their local community conditions (Ertas, 2016). Millennials who engage in the FBO's mission outreach programs for social causes contribute to positive social change by volunteering time, contributing money, or donating in-kind goods with ministries that align with millennials' interests. When nonprofits can extend their missions to additional

community members or provide additional benefits to the same community sectors, then positive social change occurs (Woronkowicz, 2018). Increased millennial engagement might allow nonprofits to extend mission reach and contribute to the improvement of the societal well-being through refugee placement in local communities, providing resources in community-based elder care, and soup kitchen expansion.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In this literature review, I examined the problem of declining engagement in FBOs and how millennials' low religiosity levels have contributed the most to that problem. The VCC model served as the lens for my exploration of successful strategies used by FBOs to engage millennials. Other models provide a contrasting lens to explore declining or stagnating engagement in organizations.

Content, Organization, and Search Strategy of the Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore FBO leaders' strategies to engage millennials. The research question—What strategies do FBOs' leaders use to engage millennials?—served as a guide for ensuring that the information gleaned from the literature review was relevant to the study. The literature review comprises these major discussion points: (a) Problem Overview: Declining Engagement in Faith-Based Organizations; (b) Overview of the Millennial Generation; (c) Millennial Engagement; (d) Reduced Support of FBOs; (e) Millennials' Influence on Reduced Support of FBOs; (f) Religious Markets; (g) Conceptual Framework: The Value Cocreation Model; and (h) Potential Solutions Used by Growing FBOs. The literature source requirements I applied followed the Walden University DBA Rubric (2019a), which requires that a majority of

references come from peer-reviewed sources and within 5 years of the anticipated chief academic officer approval, as represented in Table 1. The number of articles reviewed demonstrates the depth of research by topic and methodology. There were 39 articles that represented conceptual papers and 106 articles that represented empirical studies (17 on VCC, 7 on value codestruction, 38 on millennials, and 56 on FBOs); of the 106 articles composing empirical studies, 17 represented case studies, the research design for this study.

Table 1

Literature Review by Source Type and Publication Date

Source type	Total	Percentage of peer-reviewed sources	Between 2015 and 2019	Percentage of current sources
Peer-reviewed sources	138	78.9%		
Government or non-peer-reviewed seminal publications	12			
Books and other sources	25			
Total	175		111	63.1%

The literature review includes primarily peer-reviewed journal articles, along with other government or non-peer-reviewed seminal publications. Developing knowledge to answer the research question required a review of databases using relevant search terms. The primary research databases used to find articles were ABI/INFORM, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Emerald Management, ProQuest Central, Religion Database, SAGE Premier, and Taylor & Francis. Primary keywords searched included *faith-based organization, church, leaders, clergy, charity, millennials,*

generation, engagement, participation, attendance, contribution, donations, value co-creation, value co-destruction, and *strategy*.

Problem Overview: Declining Engagement in Faith-Based Organizations

Religiosity among American adults has declined since the 1990s, according to General Social Survey (GSS) data from 1972 to 2014 reviewed by Twenge et al. (2016). From 2006 to 2014, millennials, ages 18–29, were less religious than baby boomers (born 1946–1964) and Generation X (born 1965–1980) had been at the same age (Twenge et al., 2016). Religiosity represents the interrelated degrees to which religion is important in a person's life, the belief in a supreme being, exclusive belief in a doctrinal faith, and belief formalized through private and public faith practices (Pearce et al., 2017). Millennials have prayed less (a private practice), favoring private religious practices over public ones, and have tended not to attend church or affiliate with a religion compared to previous generations at the same age (Twenge et al., 2016). Consequently, FBOs have experienced declining participation from American adults, especially millennials.

Along with participation, financial support has declined for religious organizations. In 2017, Americans contributed 32% of their total giving to religious organizations, down from 58% in 1983 (Indiana University, 2018). To sustain their missions, churches require members' support through participation and contributions (A. Chan et al., 2015). Members who frequently participate in their church's services and activities are more likely to contribute to the church (Eagle, Keister, & Read, 2018; M. Kim, 2013; Lyons & Nivison-Smith, 2006) and its missions (Schnable, 2015) than those who do not attend. When people have strayed from attending the church, a common

reason to return to the church was to raise children in a church environment (A. Chan et al., 2015). However, millennials have delayed meeting the adulthood milestones of leaving home, obtaining financial independence, marrying, and becoming a parent (McLeigh & Boberiene, 2014). Millennials who had not yet married or had children were the most likely to decrease their religiosity during young adulthood (Denton & Uecker, 2018). More research may highlight strategies that successful FBO leaders have used to engage millennials in all life stages, thus maintaining their financial viability.

Some millennials have an aversion to FBOs altogether. Some have expressed anti-institutional attitudes toward FBOs (Williams, Irby, & Warner, 2016), and others lack the funds to contribute. Although millennials are the most educated generation to date (McLeigh & Boberiene, 2014; Paulin, 2018), they matured into finding financially meaningful jobs during the weak economic conditions of the global economic downturn from the late 2000s to the early 2010s, contributing to high unemployment (Blumenberg, Kelcie, Smart, & Taylor, 2016). More education and less employment opportunities for millennials have resulted in accrued student debt and low-paying jobs without enough income to pay off the debt (McLeigh & Boberiene, 2014). General discontent with their stage of life has led millennials to distrust and disengage from traditional institutions, including marriage, political parties, and churches (McLeigh & Boberiene, 2014). Some millennials engaged in activism and social change movements (McClennen, 2018; Milkman, 2017). Some millennials supported nonprofits to champion their cause-related efforts (DeVaney, 2015; Gorczyca & Hartman, 2017). Millennials use social media and networking in conjunction with in-person protest to increase their reach, which is

different from how generations were able to socialize their protests in the 60s and 70s (McClennen, 2018). Some millennials have prioritized maturing their self-identity (e.g., pursuing romantic relationships, establishing independence, and increasing their education) at the expense of spending time fostering their faith (M. Chan et al., 2015).

Churches require continued sustainability because their programs provide vital support to members and nonmembers in their communities, regardless of faith. Communities benefit when churches mobilize their members to provide services. For example, a rural church in Southwest Virginia developed a rotating host program in which six churches provided warm housing to 25 homeless men (Oliver, Robinson, & Koebel, 2015). The churches responded with the program when members found a homeless man frozen to death outside the warm churches. The man had been unable to find low-income housing (Oliver et al., 2015).

Churches provide health and social services to difficult-to-serve populations inside and outside their congregations. For example, in North Dakota, two rural Christian congregations responded to aging members' health needs when social services were not available (Flanagan, 2018). The congregations provided life transition support, transportation, informal networking, and counseling services for members with dementia (Flanagan, 2018). Churches have tailored outreach programs to their communities' needs. In North Central Texas, Protestant Korean-American church members supported local nonmember Korean seniors by alleviating language barriers and issues regarding access to social services. Members enabled nonmembers' access to spiritual needs,

transportation, health care screening, translation services, and nonmember contacts (E. Kim, 2016).

Faith-based organizations play a primary role in resettling refugees into local communities (Trinidad, Soneoulay-Gillespie, Birkel, & Brennan, 2018). In the United States, FBOs compose six of nine voluntary agencies working in local communities across the country to resettle refugees and their families (Trinidad et al., 2018; United Nations, 2019). Some FBOs coordinate housing, job placement, health access, education resources, and other social services for refugees (Trinidad et al., 2018). Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains (2019) is able to provide support to refugees and community members because churches and private donors contribute resources. Whether refugee or nonrefugee, social service beneficiaries in the community receive support with adoption counseling, disaster response, foster care, older adult care, pregnancy counseling, emergency childcare reprieve, and refugee asylum (Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains, 2019).

However, some Protestant churches have reduced social service programs or provided inconsistent support for them (Belcher & Tice, 2011), and some churches have provided only minor or peripheral social service activities (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013), perhaps because of reduced financial support from their donors. A reduction in funding or support of FBOs by younger generations might diminish future benefits many FBOs provide their communities. Faith-based organizations might be unable to support their missions because they depend on people's willingness to give their time and money. If FBO leaders do not determine how to engage millennials in their programs and social

ministry outreach, FBOs might be less able to fulfill their missions. Thus, an overview of who millennials are and what their generation represents is necessary before comprehending the magnitude of their influence on FBOs' viability.

Overview of the Millennial Generation

Delbosc et al. (2019) defined millennials as the generation born within the last 2 decades of the 20th century; thus, in 2019, millennials were approximately 20–39 years old. Most of the peer-reviewed research conducted on millennials includes this definition of the generation, despite variations in the start and end birth years. Mannheim (1952/1928) interpreted a generation as bound by birth range; geographic region; and historical, social, and cultural influences. Mannheim's interpretation provides context for understanding who millennials are, not only in birth range but in life stages, historical context, and political, technological, social, and cultural influences as they have matured into their young adulthood in the United States.

Economically disadvantaged. Because millennials are the largest and the most educated generation to date, many with advanced degrees (McLeigh & Boberiene, 2014; Paulin, 2018), they are apt to drive the future viability of industries and organizations. In 2016, 37.0% of American young adults (ages 25–34) had a bachelor's degree, compared to 22.8% of American young adults in 1975 (Vespa, 2017). However, millennials have experienced challenges in their economic and social welfare. Despite their amassed education, older millennials have accompanying student loan debt without well-paying jobs to pay off debt because of challenging conditions in the job market caused by the 2007–2009 recession (Bialik & Fry, 2019). Millennials have experienced financial

insecurity (in career, wages, and housing status) when entering young adulthood (Gurrentz, 2018). These negative economic factors have created a flux of millennials returning to their parents' homes (Blumenberg et al., 2016; Dey & Pierret, 2014). From 2005 to 2015, living patterns of young adults ages 18–34 changed (Vespa, 2017). Compared to 2005, 31% more young adults in 2016 lived with their parents than in any other living arrangement (independently or with a roommate) and had stability in doing so because of staying with them for more than a year (Vespa, 2017). However, Vespa considered young adults in dormitories as still living with parents, which could skew the reported data considering the tendencies of millennials to have pursued advanced degrees.

Delayed adulthood milestones. Millennials' economic insecurity delayed major life decisions, including marriage and parenthood, relative to earlier generations. From a review of the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey supplements, in 1976, Vespa (2017) identified that 85% of women and 75% of men ages 25–29 were married but, as of 2014, marriage percentages for that age range dropped to 46% and 32%, respectively. Gurrentz (2018) labeled millennials' economic insecurity as a factor contributing to their reduced marriage rates, reasoning that millennials value becoming financially secure before marrying. Millennials have also delayed becoming parents (Monte, 2017; Vespa, 2017). As of 2016, rates of women ages 30–34 who had never given birth increased by 17.6% compared to 2006 (Monte, 2017). In 1976, 69% of women ages 25–29 had a child but, as of 2014, birthrates dropped to 50% for that age range (Vespa, 2017). Parenthood may precede marriage for many millennials (Vespa,

2017). However, Gurrentz's (2018) argument that millennials have delayed major adulthood milestones, including marriage, because of lacking financial security does not support the instances when millennials have become parents ahead of marrying. These instances may reflect a shift of cultural and generational values rather than economic readiness for parenthood because parents have a considerable economic burden to raise their children (Maroto, 2018). Vespa (2017) described a phenomenon of emerging adulthood in which young people delay traditional events at different times and in different order compared to their parents; emerging adults are those in emerging adulthood.

Millennial Engagement

According to Merriam-Webster, engagement represents an emotional involvement or commitment. Pertaining to church involvement or commitment, engagement represents increased frequency of church attendance, active participation in services or programming activities, and the degree in which the importance of religion in a person's life influences a strengthening commitment to the church (Forbes & Zampelli, 2014). Millennials may demonstrate increased engagement through their willingness to bring others or become leaders of activities. Engagement acts in religious organizations stem from attitudes, emotions, and intentional behaviors rooted in the sense of belonging, identity, and passion for the FBO's mission (Kang, 2016). Contextual variances (e.g., economic, political, technological, social, and multicultural) between generations may influence ways that millennials engage in organizations differently than older generations did at the same age. In other words, the strategies that used to work with Generation X or

baby boomers may not work with millennials. Also, there may or may not be similar strategies to engage people across generations regardless of age.

Millennial engagement outside of FBOs. Given the economic and generational conditions influencing millennials, their discontent upon entering adulthood (van der Walt, 2017) has led many to engage in activism (DeVaney, 2015; Milkman, 2017) or cause-related nonprofit efforts (DeVaney, 2015; Gorczyca & Hartman, 2017). Millennials are like baby boomers in their support through activism for social causes but, millennials are more likely to volunteer their time than to donate because of their economic struggles (Utne, Ogilvy, & Edmondson, 2014). Although millennials may seek to participate in FBOs to reinforce values at critical life stages (Powell et al., 2017), those who have delayed these milestones may engage outside of FBOs instead. In this ever-connected world, millennials are concerned with what others perceive of their engagement choices.

Influences on millennials' willingness to engage in causes. Weber (2017) suggested that millennials' attempts to form their identities in an ever-connected world have created tension between concern for others (altruism) and concern for self (narcissism). Millennials have emphasized improving society and having concern for others (Ertas, 2016); however, Twenge and Foster (2010) found that college students in Southern Alabama demonstrated more narcissistic tendencies in the late 2000s than students did in the early 1990s. Despite increased narcissism, millennials have been able to show concern for others when engaged in community service (Credo, Lanier,

Matherne, & Cox, 2016) and when exposed to the cultural and religious sensitivities of those they serve (Herzog, Harris, & Peifer, 2018).

Self-confidence and emotional connection to causes matter to millennials who support organizations. For example, millennials' primary motivations for online engagement with cause-related activities have included experiencing stimulation, building knowledge, and accomplishing something (Schattke, Ferguson, & Paulin, 2017). Schattke et al. (2017) found that first-year millennial undergraduate business students who were emotionally connected to a cause were as likely to engage in social causes in person as they were online. Wallace, Buil, and de Chernatony (2017) investigated Irish university students' online involvement with charities and found that those with high self-esteem were as likely to share social issues on social media as they were to donate and volunteer in-person. However, students who had low self-esteem were overly conscious of their online presence and others' judgments and shared online posts to impress others (Wallace et al., 2017). Thus, social media represents an additional, complex influence on millennials that previous generations did not experience at the same age. More research may help to understand how FBO leaders engage millennials within supportive peer groups, commensurate with generational behaviors.

Online technologies have influenced how millennials interact with their peers and perceive the real world. Peers and family influence millennials' social media behavior (Ivanova, Flores-Zamora, Khelladi, & Ivanaj, 2019; Wallace et al., 2017). Hong, Tandoc, Kim, Kim, and Wise (2012) studied Midwestern millennial students' behavior on Facebook. Hong et al. (2012) found that the students relied on other people's posts

(social cues by others) to form opinions on profile owners' perceived popularity, which in some cases resulted in negative perceptions of social media personae. Some students did not believe that many social media profiles reflected real life, because they knew people manipulated their profiles (Hong et al., 2012). Alternatively, Seelig (2018) found that some millennials believed the social media world felt more real than the real world. Therefore, millennials might feel conflicted constructing their self-identity online versus in person because of peer influences to show a different face online. In the next part, I review reduced support of FBOs, followed by millennials' contribution to that decline because of their generation-specific different engagement patterns.

Reduced Support of Faith-Based Organizations

Americans have grown less religious since the 1970s (Twenge et al., 2016), and the trend continues by generation (Pew Research Center, 2015). Support of FBOs has diminished, as Americans have participated and contributed less since the early 1980s (Indiana University, 2018; Osili et al., 2016). In recent decades, Americans have fewer affiliations with churches and are less observant of religious beliefs; praying and attending services have lessened, as have people's avowals of their religion's importance (Pew Research Center, 2015; Twenge et al., 2016).

Types of FBOs. In this study, the focus was on leaders of churches, their programs for serving the community, and their connected ministries, all of which make up FBOs. How an FBO integrates religion into its practices may affect the degree of support someone gives the organization. Through their mission outreach, churches often team with charities to serve the community with or without a faith-based message.

Leadership teams within FBOs steer the practices of their FBOs to reflect the importance of their faith, either integrating their religious beliefs into their practices or offering practices outside of religious belief (Monsma, 2002; Sider & Unruh, 2004). Bielefeld and Cleveland (2013) identified three areas for these practices: (a) religious expression; (b) religious activities and service provision; and (c) funding, decision-making, and authority. IBISWorld (2018) identified religious organizations as synonymous with FBOs; organizations that serve the community with faith elements comprise FBOs (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013; Sider & Unruh, 2004). However, the degree of faith incorporated into how FBOs serve their stakeholders influences their engagement of current and potential members.

Common beliefs and practices. Incongruence of people's beliefs and practices with their church's influences them to change their attendance patterns or stop attending church (see Marshall & Olson [2018] for people with low church attendance but proclaimed high spirituality). For example, dissatisfaction with a church's beliefs and the enactment of those beliefs through practices have influenced adults to participate in church less than if they had been satisfied with the practices, switch religions, or declare themselves religious "nones" by disaffiliating from organized religions (Suh & Russell, 2015). Thus, the degree of alignment between people's religiosity and a church's beliefs and practices affects a church's religious market.

Individual religiosity. Religiosity represents the importance that people place on a doctrinal faith and belief in a supreme being (Granger, Lu, Conduit, Veale, & Habel, 2014; Pearce et al., 2017). People formalize their belief through expression in private

and public faith practices (Good & Willoughby, 2014). Private religious practices include prayer, meditation, and reading the dominant books of a person's faith, whereas public practices could include participation and attendance in religious services and programming (Twenge et al., 2016). Religiosity is important, because a church may be more likely to grow when its leaders align the religious beliefs and practices of the church with people in its ideal religious market.

Researchers measure elements of attendees' religiosity most commonly through people's service attendance (Bechert, 2018; Twenge et al., 2016) and church membership (Marshall & Olson, 2018; Pearce et al., 2017; Suh & Russell, 2015). However, to discern nuances of personal religiosity, researchers commonly measure the strength of individual religious belief through

- belief in life after death (Bechert, 2018; Marshall & Olson, 2018; Suh & Russell, 2015),
- frequency of prayer (Bechert, 2018; Marshall & Olson, 2018; Pearce et al., 2017; Suh & Russell, 2015),
- religious practices outside of the church (Suh & Russell, 2015),
- belief or confidence in God (Bechert, 2018; Marshall & Olson, 2018; Pearce et al., 2017; Suh & Russell, 2015), and
- importance of religion in life (Bechert, 2018; Pearce et al., 2017).

People who merely declare an affiliation with a church or denomination and churches that declare affiliations with denominations are not usually indicators of their growth or decline, in isolation. Although there are other influences, people's religiosity

influences whether they will express their faith publicly through church attendance. Typical performance measures indicative of changes in church participation include people's affiliations with a church, participation in a church's activities (Grandy & Levit, 2015; Marshall & Olson, 2018; Pearce et al., 2017; Pew Research Center, 2015; Suh & Russell, 2015), and public and private practice of beliefs (Reimer, 2012; Suh & Russell, 2015). However, church affiliation has become less important to Americans since the 1960s because of increasingly unclear differences between denominations (Wuthnow, 1988).

Decreasing importance of a church's declaring an affiliation. Although a church may affiliate with a denomination to distinguish its beliefs and practices from other churches, a church's affiliation no longer has the same value among American Protestants as it used to (Wuthnow, 1988). Protestant churches may have a denominational affiliation or they may remain nondenominational or independent (Jacobsen, 2011). Denominational churches include the following categories: mainline, evangelicals, charismatics (Davignon, Glanzer, & Rine, 2013), Pentecostals (Davies, 2018), historically black churches, fundamentalists (Jacobsen, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2015), and emerging churches (Burge & Djupe, 2015). Other churches are nondenominational or independent, thus do not adhere to a specific set of beliefs or practices, as denominational churches do (Jacobsen, 2011; Sanders, 2016). Nondenominational churches can be theologically innovative in adapting to attendees' needs (Bloom, 2016; Sanders, 2016) without seeking approval for changes in beliefs or practices from the denominational church's governance. In summary, an FBO leader

may categorize a church to distinguish it from other Protestant church types, thus affiliating with a denomination or remain nondenominational.

As church leaders, clergy and lay leaders (members chosen from congregations to lead) shape their potential religious markets through beliefs, practices, and affiliations (i.e., denominational, nondenominational, or independent), thus branding the churches. Clergy, as key informants for several national religious surveys, have provided information about churches (Chaves & Anderson, 2014; McClure, 2017; Whitehead & Stroope, 2015). Denominational differences have weakened since the 1960s (Suh & Russell, 2015; Wuthnow, 1988). In the 1960s and 1970s, people valued their original denominational affiliations, but their loyalty waned because of increased intermarriages between denominations and immersion in college environments (Wuthnow, 1988). In one of several studies that Wuthnow reviewed on denominational switching, 30% of couples remained in different religions, 30% of couples adopted a new religion together, and 40% of couples had one spouse adopt the other's religion. Wollschleger and Beach (2013) posited that people might have switched denominations or religions to appease others of a stronger religious belief. The decreased emphasis on denominational value has increased opportunities for nondenominational church growth (Suh & Russell, 2015). Thus, differences within affiliations may blur the value of branding a church to cater to a religious market; instead, other factors, such as the church's beliefs and practices (worship style) matter.

Reduced participation in mainline denominations. Overall, Americans have participated in denominational churches less since the 1960s (Wuthnow, 1988).

Attendance and affiliation in mainline churches have declined. From 2007 to 2014, mainline Protestantism experienced a 3.4% decline in affiliations, which represented the largest drop among Christian groups; young adults accounted for most of the decline (Pew Research Center, 2015). Dougherty, Martinez, and Martí (2015) found that 84.2% of the roughly 11,000 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America churches, a mainline denomination, experienced a 22% average drop in attendance from 1993 to 2012.

Reduced contributions. Americans' declining ties to denominational churches extend to their weakening financial support of FBOs. Denominational giving has declined significantly in the last few decades (Chaves & Anderson, 2014). Mainline Protestants often donated the smallest proportions of income to their churches compared to contributors who donated to other Christian churches (Wiepking & Bekkers, 2012). Congregations gave 50% less of their income to their denomination in 2012 than in 1998 (Chaves & Anderson, 2014). Faith-based educational institutions received, on average, 46% less financial support from their sponsoring denomination in 2011 than in 2002 (Glanzer, Rine, & Davignon, 2013). In summary, people who affiliated with and participated in church less were also less likely to donate than the unaffiliated (Wiepking, Bekkers, & Osili, 2014), resulting in reduced contributions to FBOs in recent decades (Indiana University, 2018).

Decreasing financial support of FBOs (inclusive of denominational churches) influences their future viability and the services they can offer to communities. Wiepking et al. (2014) surveyed 41,314 respondents across 22 European countries and the United States on their giving habits. Wiepking et al. (2014) correlated positive relationships

between church membership, attendance, and higher levels of charitable giving. They found that religiously affiliated individuals donated more to religious charities than the unaffiliated (Wiepking et al., 2014). However, since 1983, religious giving has shown the slowest growth rate and declined as the largest share of charitable giving compared to other giving types, of which the recipient organizations for the environment, health, education, and arts have experienced giving increases (Indiana University, 2018). With fewer incidences of people attending churches, those remaining have given and volunteered less than previous numbers of people used to contribute (Osili et al., 2016). Osili et al. (2016) analyzed the patterns of donating and volunteering across generations in a longitudinal survey of 8,000 U.S. families (N = 13,306 respondents; n = 2,892 millennials) that included interviews with 18 members of five families. Giving trended downward from older to younger generations; millennials gave significantly less in religious, secular, and total giving compared to pre–baby boomers (born 1928–1945), baby boomers, and Generation X (Osili et al., 2016). In the next part, I discuss the trend for millennials toward reduced participation and contribution in FBOs.

Millennials' Influence on Reduced Support of Faith-Based Organizations

The importance that people place on beliefs and their practice of them publicly and privately directly influence the long-term viability of FBOs. American millennials have demonstrated the least support of all adult generations (Osili et al., 2016). Their lower support of FBOs has been influenced most specifically by their (a) placing less importance on religion (Twenge et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016), (b) favoring spirituality or religious practices outside of churches (Ammerman, 2013), and (c)

becoming anti-institutional (Marshall & Olson, 2018). Millennials' decreased FBO engagement may be a generation-based effect (millennials being less religious than previous generations, as Twenge et al. [2015] and Twenge et al. [2016] suggested), and may also be normative for young adults at the stage of life before marriage or childbirth (M. Chan et al., 2015; Denton & Uecker, 2018). Millennials could thus grow out of decreased involvement when they reach those milestones.

Religion is increasingly less important. Millennials have disaffiliated from religious organizations (Reed, 2016) and expressed lower interest in religious and spiritual activities than previous generations did at the same age (Twenge et al., 2015). Twenge et al. (2015) identified that millennials' increasingly lower participation rates and religiosity levels represented a cultural move toward secularism by some within the generation. To determine whether decreased engagement is normative for millennials' current stage of life, Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) suggested that researchers disentangle life stage from generational effects across repeated cross-sectional surveys.

Generational effects on millennials placing less importance on religion. Twenge et al. (2015) and Twenge et al. (2016) reviewed cross-sectional data from different surveys and found that millennials had lower religiosity than older generations. In 2015, Twenge et al. assessed students' religious orientation across 11.2 million American millennials, Generation X, and baby boomers using two surveys' 1971–2014 longitudinal data from eighth grade through the first year of college. They found that millennials' religiosity declined in several areas as compared to previous generations: religious orientation; service attendance; attitudes toward churches; and importance

placed on religion, spirituality, and prayer (Twenge et al., 2015). Alternatively, Twenge et al. (2016) reviewed 58,893 surveys from GSS data since 1970 and found that millennials had lower religious affiliation and practices (private and public) than older generations did at the same age (18 to 29 years). Lower religiosity in millennials was influenced by their weakening commitments to religious institutions, doubts about God, and declining personal and private religious beliefs and practices (Twenge et al., 2016). Compared to previous generations, millennials identified religion as significantly less important to them: Their practices were at much lower levels and declining (Pew Research Center, 2015; Twenge et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016). The trend of millennials considering religion as less important in their lives compared to previous generations may increase FBO leaders' concerns for their missions' viability.

Millennials demonstrated the lowest religiosity compared to baby boomers and Generation X (Pew Research Center, 2015; Twenge et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016), and younger millennials, born 1990–1996, showed lower religiosity than older millennials, born 1981–1989 (Pew Research Center, 2015). Older millennials have demonstrated lower religiosity through their practices, but younger millennials have demonstrated lower religiosity through their beliefs (Pew Research Center, 2015). Millennials were 71% less likely than young adults in the 1970s to claim a religious affiliation and six times as likely never to pray as young adults were in the early 1980s (Twenge et al., 2016). Older millennials have become less religiously observant with age, attending services less (or never) and praying less (or never) than younger millennials (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Effects of life stage on millennials' placing less importance on religion. Young adults have eventually returned to the church at various life milestones, including marrying and raising children (Denton & Uecker, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2015; Schleifer & Chaves, 2017). A common reason to return to church was to raise children in a church environment, often the church in which a person was raised (A. Chan et al., 2015). Suh and Russell (2015) analyzed 2006–2010 GSS data and found that adults who were married or those who had children measured higher on most religiosity measures than those who were not married or did not have children. Married respondents increased their participation in church activities during the 4-year panel (Suh & Russell, 2015). Through analysis of the GSS's longitudinal data, Pew Research Center (2015) found that as adults aged, they tended to return to their religion, praying and attending worship services more frequently than when they were younger. Denton and Uecker (2018) analyzed four waves of the National Study of Youth and Religion and found that 25% of millennials who had married (n = 12%), married and had children (n = 14%), or cohabited with or without children (n = 17%) were more likely than singles and married couples without children to perceive their faith as important in their lives to strengthen their relationship bonds. Millennials who had formed relationships (married, started a family, or cohabited with a significant other and transitioned over 5 years to marriage or parenthood) felt that religion had increased in importance to their lives (Denton & Uecker, 2018). However, millennials have been the generation most likely to delay the milestones of marriage and parenthood (see Monte [2017] and Vespa [2017]).

Although Denton and Uecker (2018) found outcomes supporting the hypothesis that young adults tend to return to church when marrying and having children, more research may highlight whether as many millennials return to FBOs for such reasons as previous generations. In a longitudinal survey of millennial teens who aged to young adulthood between 2002 and 2013, Denton and Uecker (2018) found that millennials who had not yet married or had children were the most likely to decrease their religiosity during that period. M. Chan et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal survey of 587 Catholic and Protestant youth based in Los Angeles, California. They found decreasing religious identity to be normative for young adults, correlating with less involvement in religious institutions (M. Chan et al., 2015). As young adults, they invested their time instead in pursuing education and romantic relationships to mature their self-identity (M. Chan et al., 2015).

Hardie, Pearce, and Denton (2016) reviewed 2,602 participants' responses in the 2002 and 2005 National Study of Youth and Religion waves to assess the influence of life course transitions for adolescents (ages 13–17) and young adults (ages 16–21) on their religious service attendance patterns. These transitions included leaving home; entering college; and experiencing sexual activity, workforce transition, or a traumatic event (Hardie et al., 2016). Adolescents of Evangelical Protestant parents attended religious services more often than adolescents of mainline Protestant and Catholic parents from the second wave (Hardie et al., 2016). Nonetheless, Hardie et al. found an overall decline in religious service attendance among adolescents between waves: nonattendance increased by 57%, and weekly attendance declined by 45%. Hardie et al. conducted

multivariate analyses to determine predictive changes in religious service attendance over time. Participants who had experienced life transitions were more likely to decrease their religious service attendance than those who had not yet experienced those transitions (Hardie et al., 2016). However, participants who had experienced a major traumatic event had a .14 point higher level of predicted religious service attendance (Hardie et al., 2016). Although millennials might have a strong foundation of faith (according to reinforcement by family members, prior attendance patterns, and traumatic or natural events from life course transitions), they may still reduce how often they attend religious organizations to practice (Hardie et al., 2016). Therefore, the timing of millennials' attending church becomes an important strategy consideration for FBOs leaders.

Young adults who were affiliated and engaged with churches earlier in life might have chosen to disengage for different reasons. Disengagement factors could include a lack of faith and misalignment of personal values and beliefs (Niemelä, 2015) and a belief in the idea of community without belonging to a religious institution (Nissilä, 2018). Niemelä (2015) considered Finnish young adults who expressed low religiosity as being normal for their life stage but also noted the reduced importance millennials placed on religion compared to previous generations. Thus, trends of declining religiosity could be normative for young adults' life stage and the millennial generation.

Spirituality is more important than attending church. As noted by Twenge et al. (2015), millennials have reduced their participation habits the most, according to their service attendance and affiliation. Twenge et al. (2015) identified a 25% decrease in weekly service attendance by millennial 12th-grade respondents from 2010 to 2013

compared to 12th-grade respondents from 1976 to 1979 (baby boomers). They found that American millennial high school and entering college students were twice as likely to "never" attend religious services than were young adults measured at the same age in the early and late 1970s (Twenge et al., 2015). Instead, millennials may incline toward religiosity and spirituality without attending churches, thus affecting church participation numbers.

Young adults who declare themselves as spiritual *and* religious may be among the most passionate in their beliefs and practices (Ammerman, 2013; Marshall & Olson, 2018). For example, Ammerman investigated spirituality as a private practice and alternative to church attendance through a qualitative inquiry of 95 adults in Boston and Atlanta (22 of them millennials); adults represented Christian and Jewish traditions, the unaffiliated, seekers, and nonseekers. Ammerman (2013) found that 71% of participants discussed their meaning of spirituality as closeness to God through their connectedness with religion, in communal and individual experiences: maintaining relationships with Christian friends, praying, reading the Bible, and experiencing God in nature (Ammerman, 2013). To these participants, the location of interactions within a religious organization and regular participation in cultural activities defined their spirituality (Ammerman, 2013). In contrast, McGuire (2018) found that young Black undergraduates from a Northeastern U.S. university who were moderately religious refrained from publicly practicing their faith. These young adults may declare themselves spiritual and religious yet distance themselves from religion because of peer pressure or social

influences (McGuire, 2018). Church attendance may be in decline because of social pressures and because millennials desire to seek connections elsewhere.

Millennials who have shifted away from identifying with values instilled by religious organizations may look toward spirituality to form and reinforce their values. The number of American millennials who had remained spiritually connected through prayer (Twenge et al., 2015) and had identified as a spiritual person (Twenge et al., 2016), had declined as of 2013. Although some millennials have fostered spirituality privately, others have expressed anti-institutional attitudes toward churches (Marshall & Olson, 2018).

Although identifying as a spiritual person may be common among Americans whether they are affiliated with a religion or not (Pew Research Center, 2015), the implications of millennials' increasing their identification as "spiritual" does not bode well for churches (Chaves, 2017). Chaves (2017) did not view people who categorized themselves as "spiritual but not religious" as a market for churches to win over, but rather as a systemic softening of religious organizations' ability to influence lives through religious appeal. Ammerman (2013) studied spirituality as a private practice and an alternative to organized religion and found that those who had strong beliefs tended to belong to organizations to express them. However, those without strong beliefs were "spiritual but not belonging," lacking organizational involvement (Ammerman, 2013). Those with heightened spirituality but an aversion to religion may still seek involvement in other communities to avoid feeling senses of spiritual homelessness (see van der Walt [2017]).

Participation is important to maintain social connections. Millennials who experience peer pressures to conform or to appear religious may be more likely to *belong without believing* (see Davie [2015], Niemelä [2015], and Wollschleger & Beach [2013]), thus might lack a strong foundational faith. Spiritual but unreligious people may seek out spiritual experiences to maintain social connections with others (Baker & Smith, 2015). People have a psychological need to belong and build social connections (Rogers, Goldstein, & Fox, 2018), and some seek to belong through specific organizations. To fulfill a need to belong, Wollschleger and Beach (2013) posited that people might become *religious chameleons,* choosing religious hypocrisy (belonging to a religion without believing in the doctrine). Religious chameleons may switch denominations, religions, or affiliations to appease people of a stronger religious belief: a romantic partner, political party, business community, or family (Wollschleger & Beach, 2013). Millennials may participate through their psychological need to belong yet remain of lukewarm faith (Manglos, 2013).

Like religious chameleons, millennials could experience belief without belonging and belonging without believing. Arli and Pekerti (2016) surveyed 251 Australian undergraduates (176 of them millennials) to understand how religious identity, moral philosophy, and generational cohort influenced consumers' ethical behavior practices. Australian millennials in Arli and Pekerti's (2016) study were sensitive to what others thought they should believe but they did not actually believe; they appeared religious without having the foundational religious beliefs expressed by older generations. Jones and Elliott (2017) conducted an experiment to understand the social desirability of

religious involvement, personal religiosity, and spirituality of 169 millennial students in a Midwestern U.S. university. They used a bogus pipeline procedure to compare the control of participants' standard self-reporting of those measures to the participants within a bogus physiological setup meant to convince students that experimenters could detect disingenuous responses to reduce or prevent exaggerated self-reporting (Jones & Elliott, 2017). They found that students in the control group overreported positive relationships with God to appear more religious and committed to their faith and underreported their doubts and unwillingness to turn to God in stressful times (Jones & Elliott, 2017). Thus, external pressures influenced the millennials to overemphasize or mute their faith (Jones & Elliott, 2017).

Millennials reject religious institutions. Although some millennials have reduced religiosity, many still have faith, though not in religious institutions. Millennials, as adults, had 51% less confidence in organized religions than adults did in the 1970s (Twenge et al., 2016). Young adults, preferring autonomy in their religion and spirituality, have become anti-institutional and regarded organized religion as having too much authority (Williams et al., 2016); some felt oppressed because they were outcasted from their churches according to their looks while their churches still served society's poor (McDowell, 2018). Millennials have also shunned selecting a religious identity because of the social stigma of being religious (Edgell, Frost, & Stewart, 2017).

Millennials also may have detached from churches because their values no longer align with the churches' affiliations, beliefs, and practices. Moody and Reed (2017) suggested that American millennials have chosen to disaffiliate from evangelical

congregations because of dissatisfaction with their judgmental approaches to teaching the Gospel. Suh and Russell (2015) found that inactive nondenominational Protestants were just as strong in religiosity and prayer practices as their active counterparts. Niemelä (2015) compared Finnish Lutheran millennials' patterns of leaving the Evangelical Lutheran Church to those of a multigenerational sample of Finnish adults. Niemelä found that older generations left the church because of disappointment in religious institutions, and younger adults left because they felt their values misaligned with the church's values. Thus, Finnish millennials placed more importance in values as the key to believing in belonging than in belonging to maintain the tradition of attending church (Niemelä, 2015).

M. Chan et al. (2015) found that few millennials changed religious affiliations, instead changing from being religiously affiliated to having no religious affiliation. Some millennials sought to develop their individuality apart from how their parents raised them (M. Chan et al., 2015). Salas-Wright et al. (2015) reviewed 2010 and 2004–2005 data from two nationally representative surveys and found that 16–28% of emerging adults (ages 18–25) had disengaged publicly and privately from religion compared to previous surveys' results in which of 3–14% of adults had disengaged. Some emerging adults favored practicing religious beliefs privately or attending religious services without interacting socially with fellow attendees (Salas-Wright et al., 2015). However, some adults have begun to attend emerging churches to express their beliefs (Burge & Djupe, 2017; Martí, 2017). Growing churches understand the needs of their religious markets.

Religious Markets

Iannaccone (1991) analyzed Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* to formalize the concept of a religious market. In treating religion like other commodities, Iannaccone posited that "the consumer's freedom to choose constrains the producers of religion. A particular religious firm can flourish only if it provides a commodity that is at least as attractive as its competitors'" (p. 158). Thus, Iannaccone argued the need for churches to remain competitive in their religious markets by providing attractive commodities (religious services and programs) using efficient methods without profiting. Value cocreation emerged as the marketing industry shifted from an exchange paradigm (value delivered through exchanging products or services), to what Sheth and Uslay (2007) identified instead, as a focus on creating and delivering value through human interactions (relationships). In this study, the VCC model was a possible lens with which to understand ways FBOs engaged millennials by creating mutually beneficial value between providers and their customers.

Conceptual Framework: The Value Cocreation Model

The VCC model is a process of continual interaction and engagement between two actors (organization and customer, for example) that emphasizes customer service and satisfaction (A. Lee & Kim, 2018); the goal is to make products or services better than one actor participating in processes could accomplish alone (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013). Although a nonprofit does not profit from its work, its leaders must understand what participants value so the latter do not lose interest in achieving the nonprofit's mission. Following are the key principles of VCC:

- Value depends on human experiences.
- Experience derives from interactions with others.
- Organizations facilitate cocreated value through interactions on engagement platforms.
- Cocreation is the process from which mutually expanded value results, and people derive value according to their meaningful and productive human experiences on engagement platforms (Ramaswamy, 2011).

Because value is relative (Nicholson, 1903), the type of value derived will depend on the individual, the entity, and the benefit sought. The following literature review of this study's conceptual framework proceeds in the order of the VCC model's evolution: exchange and use value; value creation; value coproduction; service-dominant (S-D) logic; value cocreation; value codestruction as a contrasting lens to VCC; applications that foster value cocreation and avoid codestroying value; and applications of the VCC model in FBOs.

Exchange and use value. According to Sheth and Uslay (2007), exchanges by organizations to satisfy organizational goals and people's needs (uses) have comprised a foundational concept in marketing processes. The value of a good or service varies according to its exchange value, which depends on available supply and consumer demand, and its use value, which depends on a consumer's intended use (Gordon, 1964; Grönroos & Voima, 2013). Value has emerged according to rarity in supply or demand (Aristotle, trans. 1908), consumer demands (Aristotle, trans. 1908; Gordon, 1964; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), total cost of production (A. Smith, 1776/1923), the labor

needed to produce services or goods (Marx, 1906; Nicholson, 1903; A. Smith, 1776/1923), competitive advantage in delivering services or goods (Porter, 1990/2011), and the mental or physical use of resources (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). In *The Wealth of Nations,* A. Smith (1776/1923) described value in terms of its having either utility (value in use) or purchasing power (value in exchange). A. Smith provided the examples of rare diamonds having great purchasing power but little use value and water having great use value but little purchasing power. Thus, rarity influences supply and demand (Aristotle, trans. 1908) such that a person may desire possessing rare goods but would need to exchange more goods to possess them. In an interview with Porter (known for introducing five forces that shape an industry), Driver (2012) documented different ways to view how corporations regard value. According to Driver (2012), Porter suggested that corporations should transition from delivering value just for commercial needs to creating shared value with the consumer, such that businesses and consumers share in the benefits and responsibilities of addressing and improving broader societal needs.

Value creation. In older models of value creation, the producer decides what the consumer values and controls the production of services and goods apart from the consumers, or with their limited role (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Regarding the shifting views of how producers have delivered value according to foundational marketing concepts, producers have varied from controlling value creation inside their organization (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) to inviting consumers to cocreate value with them (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). Grönroos and Voima conceptualized VCC as the *experience of value-in-use,* because the cocreated value

depends on consumers' positive experiences over time and the ability of both parties to extract value out of those experiences.

Value coproduction. Coproduction represents a relationship between an organization's employees and customers, requiring direct and active customer involvement in the work at hand (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016), but in which the company retains responsibility for production (Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, & Chan, 2013). The customer's primary role in value coproduction is to innovate or customize services (Chathoth et al., 2013). Normann and Ramírez (1993) originated value coproduction to involve stakeholders (e.g., suppliers, partners, allies, and customers) with businesses to coproduce value beyond the traditional set of roles and relationships in a business's value chain. Brandsen and Honingh (2016) provided an example in which students were required to provide input into and interact with lessons but were not involved in designing them. In this way, the students were critical to value coproduction in implementing the school's core service: education.

Customers contribute to a company's development processes in novel ways by innovating products and services dyadically with producers (Normann & Ramírez, 1993), resulting in mutually beneficial relationships (Ramírez, 1999). The music industry offers a practical example of value coproduction in which companies choose to rely on consumers to innovate. Music fans created online music stations through Apple Music, whose software algorithms recommended new online music from similar sounding bands before fans decided whether to purchase (Parry, Bustinza, & Vendrell-Herrero, 2012). Thus, fans coproduced value by opting in or out of industry-recommended music, and

they provided strategic feedback about their preferences (Parry et al., 2012). Companies benefitted from consumers' involvement in shaping future music offerings; thus, value was coproduced according to consumers' willingness to identify their listening and purchasing preferences (Parry et al., 2012).

Differentiating value coproduction from VCC. Brandsen and Honingh (2016) suggested that in value coproduction, customers are involved in the design and implementation of the company's core or complementary services. However, Brandsen and Honingh (2016) discussed variations in coproduction types in which the customer may be closer to implementing services. Brandsen and Honingh (2016) did not differentiate customers' involvement in value coproduction processes from their involvement in VCC processes. In VCC, the differentiating factor is the company's adaptation to customers where they choose to interact (physically or virtually) through engagement platforms to experience value (Ramaswamy, 2011). Ramaswamy and Gouillart (2010) provided the example of LEGO stores, where customers received value through experiences on the stores' engagement platforms. LEGO developed an online Mindstorm community in which LEGO enthusiasts, LEGO brand ambassadors, and employees interacted by collaborating on brick collections and desired brick designs (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013). LEGO's brick-and-mortar stores enabled customers to interact in real life with other enthusiasts by building on tables, trying the latest LEGO products, and purchasing anything they built (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010). LEGO's ambassadors organized 100 BrickFest festivals worldwide that connected over 900,000 LEGO enthusiasts in a community learning, designing, listening, and appreciation

experience; for example, attendees displayed their favorite LEGO creations for community-wide appreciation (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013). Through the ambassador program and multiple virtual and physical platforms, LEGO enabled continual interactive opportunities to cocreate value with customers, who often designed their experiences (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013). However, S-D logic provides yet another way to create value with customers.

Service-dominant logic. Vargo and Lusch (2004) introduced S-D logic as a theoretical framework for assessing the intangible value delivered by an organization given its unique approach to services, processes, and relationships. Vargo and Lusch conceived of S-D logic as the way a firm focuses on delivering services to the customer through a relational, service-centered, and customer-oriented approach. In S-D logic, consumers act as coproducers and cocreators in delivering and customizing the value they receive (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Within the S-D logic framework, the company must interact with customers to help them become smarter in customizing their goods and services (Karpen, Bove, Lukas, & Zyphur, 2015). Karpen et al. (2015) assessed the S-D orientation of 105 Australian auto dealers through surveys of auto consumers and dealerships' leaders and financial representatives. They found that the companies' S-D orientation influenced customers' actual performance outcomes more than the customers' perceived value (Karpen et al., 2015). Karpen et al. identified S-D interactions as (a) relational (rapport between dealership employees and customers); (b) ethical (no pressure or manipulation to buy); (c) individual-focused (sensitivity to financial situations); (d) empowered (buyers involved in improving services); (e) concerted (dealership desire to

work with buyers); and (f) developmental (dealership making buyer more knowledgeable).

Terms are important when distinguishing S-D logic from VCC. In S-D logic's customization approach, the company standardizes specifications, from which the customer selects. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) criticized customization because of its hands-off relationship between company and customer and its questionable assumption that the company could deliver according to a customer's needs. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) preferred the engagement approach of the VCC tenets instead. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) contended that, through personalization, customers could interact (e.g., in person, on telephone, online, etc.) with the company to make their iterative selections. Within S-D logic, customers instead interact with companies according to the companies' abilities to distribute services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) explained that VCC between firms and consumers occurs through interactive and personalized experiences on the companies' engagement platforms. Thus, human experiences, as shaped together by customer and company (for example), are critical to cocreating value (Ramaswamy, 2011).

Value cocreation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) introduced the term *value cocreation* and presented the concept of the customer as a competent partner in cocreating value when offered personalized experiences. Companies benefited according to how well they provided an easy experience from which customers could personalize and then purchase products or services (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Plé (2017) identified VCC as emerging from the increased attention on active customer roles in

value exchange processes. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) portrayed customers as transformed from having passive to active roles in improving services, goods, or experiences by way of companies' engagement platforms. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) contended that as customers became more knowledgeable about companies' competencies, products, and processes, the companies could leverage that knowledge to improve what they delivered. Thus, through the VCC model, companies have incorporated customers' involvement when developing, collaborating, and competing in their industries (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000).

Bharti, Agrawal, and Sharma (2015) suggested that top management's readiness and middle management's willingness to adopt VCC practices could be critical to achieving VCC outcomes. Bharti et al. (2015) identified the management structure as influential to VCC processes and outcomes because of its strategic decision-making authorities to enable VCC activities to occur on engagement platforms. These engagement platforms (virtual or physical) engage consumers interactively, continually, and iteratively to personalize their experiences, resulting in mutual benefits to them and the company (Bharti et al., 2015). Organizations that use engagement platforms benefit from a long-term relationship with customers, promote a culture of togetherness, and meet consumers' needs as they glean the preferences and intangible feelings of consumers, who become a part of company processes (Bharti et al., 2015). Through understanding the tenets of VCC, organizational leaders can assess their readiness for VCC and the potential benefits of process improvements made with stakeholders instead of in isolation from them. Because younger generations might assess value differently

from older generations, organizations could learn what appeals to those stakeholders, to engage them in their activities.

Using the VCC model, Dong (2015) demonstrated that customers' desired level of participation in the design or production of services and products depended on their expertise level. Dong focused on differentiating participants who wished to design their experiences versus those who only wanted to produce their experience. Dong compared similar design-only examples in which customers share information to personalize their experiences: vacation tour planning and picture frame designs. Production-only examples in which customers provide physical labor include grocery checkout and furniture assembly. Dong learned that motivations for customers' participation options depended on their perceived value during their chosen experiences and their skill level to participate at various levels.

In a dining example, Dong (2015) had customers choose between two restaurants: full service (nonparticipatory) and participatory. According to Dong, in the participatory restaurant, designing customers picked out their meats and vegetables physically from shelves (emulating VCC) or selected them from a checklist (emulating S-D logic), whereas full-service customers grilled preselected meals using a tabletop stove (i.e., produced, emulating VCP) on their table. There was not an option for participants to design and grill a meal. Evaluations of restaurant experiences showed that consumers who participated only in the production experience perceived lower value than those who were part of the design (Dong, 2015). The consumers preferred to shape their experiences through designing; their involvement in the process replaced the

organization's role (Dong, 2015). Dong found that when customers were primed about the type of participation (only selecting customized meals from a checklist of ingredients or physically picking out food for the chef to cook versus picking out food and cooking it), they still preferred to design their experience than to produce it. However, the experience that customers have with preparing food in a restaurant setting may limit these findings. Using VCC the model, the restaurant represented a platform for engaging customers in physically selecting (or designing) their meal through a sensory experience (Dong, 2015). Engagement platforms differentiate the VCC model from the S-D logic model.

Value cocreation differs from other value exchange or value in use processes in that leaders employing VCC

- recognize stakeholders as having a voice in shaping outcomes,
- engage stakeholders through multiple channels to meet their needs,
- manage diverse stakeholders through personalization, and
- encourage continual dialogue (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000).

Pera, Occhiocupo, and Clarke (2016) enhanced the VCC model by identifying intangible *encounter moments* as key to cocreating value between stakeholders. They found that some shared motives were critical for processes to result in VCC (Pera et al., 2016). Pera et al. (2016) studied leaders, event organizers, educators, and community patrons during a food and nutrition event in which multiple stakeholders cocreated value by learning skills (tangible outcomes) and building relationships and reputations (intangible outcomes). These outcomes were possible because the participants were inclusive, open, and trusting

of each other (Pera et al., 2016). Figure 1 is a visual representation of value creation, value coproduction, S-D logic, and VCC, which summarize the different ways to involve customers in creating value.

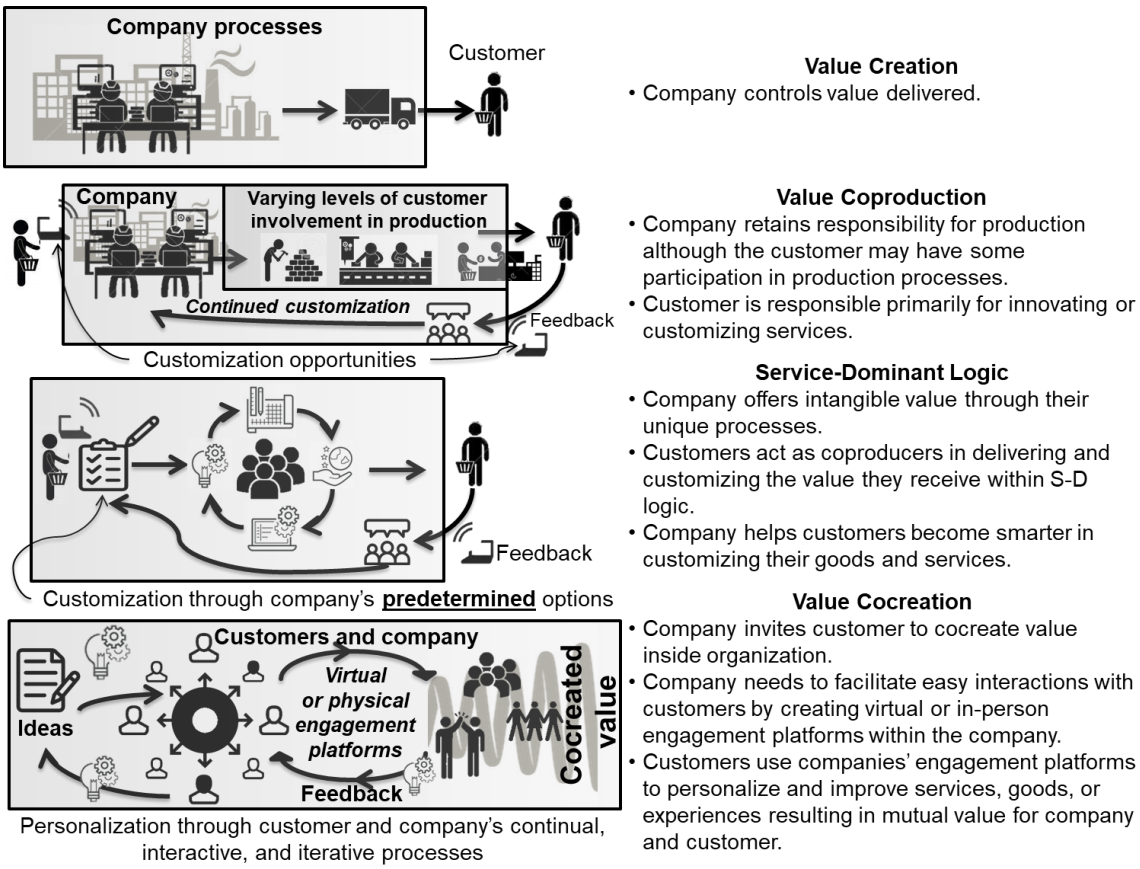

Figure 1. Different ways of involving customers in organizational processes when creating value. Information for value creation from Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004); information for value coproduction from Brandsen and Honingh (2016) and Chathoth et al. (2013); information for S-D logic from Vargo and Lusch (2004) and Karpen et al. (2015); and information for VCC from Grönroos and Voima (2013) and Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004).

Value codestruction as a contrasting lens to VCC. Leaders in FBOs may consider whether value codestruction, an opposing model to VCC, explains declining or stagnating millennial engagement in FBOs. Although the purpose of this study was to

identify successful strategies that FBO leaders used to engage millennials, a value codestruction lens can illustrate what happens when mutual benefits do not occur and illuminate the viability difficulties experienced by FBOs. Plé and Cáceres (2010) suggested that if value can be cocreated through interactional processes between two service systems, then it can be codestroyed. Plé (2017), Plé and Cáceres, and Woodruff and Flint (2006) criticized studies in marketing literature that focused only on the positive side of VCC exchanges with customers. The potential negative outcomes of such relationships are rarely the subject of scrutiny (Woodruff & Flint, 2006). Jaworski and Kohli (2006) explored how company leaders might no longer want to rely on customers in VCC processes when concerned about lacking trust, limited time, misaligned organizational values, and costs.

When entities have failed to benefit mutually from exchange relationships, VCC does not occur, instead resulting in value noncreation (or "no-creation," as Makkonen & Olkkonen [2017] called it), value diminution (Vafeas, Hughes, & Hilton, 2016), or value codestruction (Plé & Cáceres, 2010); each of these elements are on the continuum away from VCC, as shown in Figure 2.

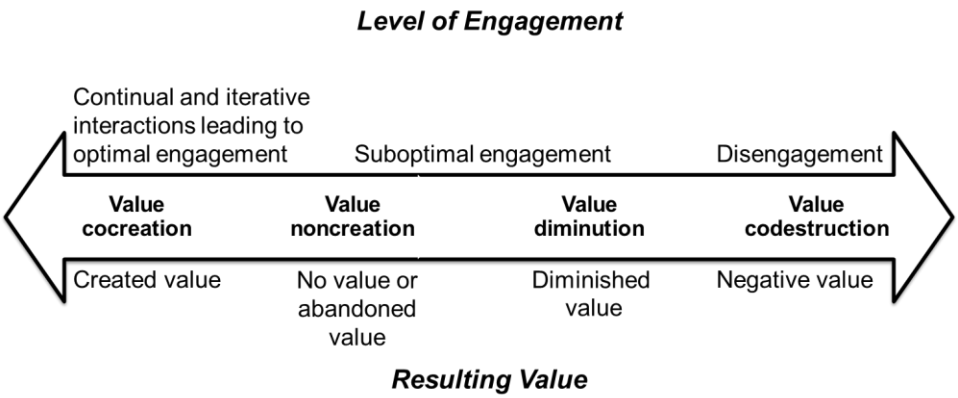

Figure 2. Continuum of value cocreation, value noncreation, value diminution, and value codestruction and their corresponding organizational engagement levels. Information for VCC from Hamby and Brinberg (2016); information for value noncreation from Makkonen and Olkkonen (2017); information for value diminution from Vafeas et al. (2016); and information for value codestruction from Mills and Razmdoost (2016).

Examples of value noncreation, value diminution, and value codestruction.

Returning to Figure 1, when companies fail to (a) facilitate easy interactions with customers on engagement platforms, (b) integrate customers into organizational processes, or (c) incorporate customers' design or feedback into customer experiences, then value noncreation, value diminution, or value codestruction may occur. Multiple stakeholder interactions that involve external pressures, such as public scrutiny or government regulations, create an environment conducive for value noncreation (Makkonen & Olkkonen, 2017), reduced value, or value codestruction. Makkonen and Olkkonen (2017) found that value noncreation resulted from a VCC failure between a new Finnish art museum and a popular media company. The organizations put in 3 years of significant effort toward achieving a positive collaboration, but time pressure (they were behind schedule) cost them the hoped-for outcome and destroyed the opportunity to cocreate value (Makkonen & Olkkonen, 2017). The media company backed out of the relationship, only sponsoring the museum rather than fully collaborating with it, in what Makkonen and Olkkonen identified as an indifference to achieving VCC.

Further on the spectrum toward value codestruction is value diminution. Vafeas et al. (2016), in a multiple-case study of 25 advertising agencies in Southern England, found that diminished value resulted from imbalances in client–agency relationships. The clients (multiple marketing directors and brand managers) and agencies (account

managers and creative directors) failed to fully use their human capital (Vafeas et al., 2016). When a brand manager rushed a creative director in the development of marketing for a global food manufacturer, suboptimal interactions resulted that led to mistrust, reduced commitment to goals, reduced motivation, lower creativity, and discordant coordination within the marketing team (Vafeas et al., 2016). For example, some brand managers accused the creative directors of being too risk averse when trying to create new marketing strategies for a brand, thus leading to trust issues in the team (Vafeas et al., 2016).

Value codestruction occurs when two entities experience reduced well-being because of misuse of organizational resources or failure to integrate resources in an expected manner (Plé, 2017; Plé & Cáceres, 2010). Järvi, Kähkönen, and Torvinen (2018) found that value codestruction resulted when a Finnish organization could not adapt to meet customers' needs, resulting in poor service delivery and negative feedback from customers on social media. Järvi et al. analyzed the situation and found that customers had failed to communicate their expectations to the organization and their disappointment led to failed collaboration among supply managers and marketing employees. Thus, participating stakeholders may need to share their expectations to mutually benefit from meaningful outcomes. Applying value codestruction lessons to FBOs, leaders need to realize the potential to codestroy value when they fail to understand and meet the expectations of current and potential members. Shared motives between participating entities are critical for processes to result in VCC (Pera et al., 2016).

Simultaneous VCC and value codestruction. Researchers have determined that simultaneous VCC and value codestruction are possible (Järvi et al., 2018; Plé & Cáceres, 2010; Quach & Thaichon, 2017). Järvi et al. (2018) have termed this "simultaneous cophenomenon" an anomaly. In the health industry, VCC outcomes have occurred because of mutual access to resources for patient and provider and knowledge and skills gained through participative communication and integrated technology (Osei-Frimpong, Wilson, & Lemke, 2018). Robertson, Polonsky, and McQuilken (2014) considered the benefits of providers' supporting telemedicine (answering patients' health questions by phone). However, Robertson et al. (2014) identified a danger of value codestruction occurring when patients self-diagnose with online information. Because the patients lack knowledge, they might misuse the information, risking negative health outcomes (Robertson et al., 2014).

Applications that foster VCC and avoid value codestruction. Whether VCC or value codestruction develops between consumer and organization may depend on (a) the consumer's feelings of value (Quach & Thaichon, 2017); (b) the skill, expertise, or knowledge consumers need to inform their experiences (Bruce, Wilson, Macdonald, & Clarke, 2019; Dolan, Seo, & Kemper, 2019; Dong, 2015); and (c) mutual access to information (Järvi et al., 2018; Robertson et al., 2014). For example, customers post negative or positive views of organizations on social media according to the service they receive (Dolan et al., 2019). Depending on how the organization responds to the customer, value codestruction or VCC can result (Dolan et al., 2019). With luxury brands, for example, customers' perceptions of value change according to whether they

feel they receive enough love, status, information, and services (Quach & Thaichon, 2017).

Quach and Thaichon (2017) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study to explore VCC and value codestruction in exchanges of information, products, and status between customers and luxury brands in stores and online through the companies' social media platforms. They found that the love of a luxury fashion brand facilitated VCC when customers shared favorable attitudes, collaborated, provided information, and bragged about social status on social media; the brand benefited from the boosted image proclaimed by customers (Quach & Thaichon, 2017). However, that love fueled value codestruction between some customers and the brand when too many people attained similarly luxurious status, thus stripping the brand of its exclusivity. The flux of new, admiring customers created false expectations that the brand could not meet, except through more personalized engagement experiences (Quach & Thaichon, 2017). In those personalized experiences, though, the producers' and consumers' exchange of resources cocreated value; for example, using chat functions to ask questions about products' features, placed personalized products on hold, or pickup a product at an alternate store location (Quach & Thaichon, 2017). Because of that, Quach and Thaichon (2017) concluded that engagement was the key to VCC.

When FBOs fail to find opportunities for two-way communication, in person or online, they send current and potential members the message that they are not open to dialogue. Puffer (2018) suggested that millennials who are unsure of how their religion can support their lives may question it to the point of dissatisfaction and leave the

institution. Alternatively, millennials who find resolution of their insecurities about the world in their faith may welcome strong relationships with faith leaders and mentors (Puffer, 2018). Kennedy and Guzmán (2016) found that millennials cocreated value with companies when they relied on social status and social responsibility to feel connected with a brand, thus boosting the brand and millennials' images. Gorczyca and Hartman (2017) suggested placing millennials on nonprofit advisory boards so that they can share their ideas and feel valued; their ideas could enhance nonprofits' functioning. Millennials might feel valued when engaged as vital members of leadership teams and mission outreach experiences.

Digital technologies. Digital technologies are used as engagement platforms to enable VCC outcomes in multiple industries. Different organizations use social media to raise awareness, share information, build knowledge, engender a sense of belonging and identity, and achieve goals specific to their group (Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Sorensen, Andrews, & Drennan, 2017), thus cocreating value for all involved. Using social media, English football enthusiasts built knowledge, cohesion and group identity, and a sense of community, all without organizational involvement (Pongsakornrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). Cause-related communities use social media to gain advocacy beyond an individual's effort: sharing events, raising money, and building awareness (Sorensen et al., 2017). The tone, post content, and type of social media site (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube) that posters use influence relationships with the community (Sorensen et al., 2017). A bookstore that promoted literacy on its social media site used encouraging words when responding in thanks to supporters on

their posts, thus conveying optimism in their campaign (Sorensen et al., 2017). In the education industry, classrooms integrated technology into the curriculum and experienced a shift from one-way to participative communications experiences (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). More research may highlight the benefits that FBOs have received from integrating technology to engage their stakeholders in dialogue and support, including building awareness of their missions.

Leaders must understand the best strategies and tools for multiple communications to, from, and between millennials. Although online engagement platforms have allowed organizations to reach a broader community of stakeholders, these platforms might not only cocreate but codestroy value. Rennels, Gomez, Gonzalez, Rougeau, and Jenkins (2016) cautioned church leaders about using the exclusionary (however unintended) word choices of "family" and "community" online; these words may not translate to younger generations (Rennels et al., 2016). As noted earlier, millennials may delay traditional adulthood milestones of parenting (Monte, 2017) and marriage (Vespa, 2017) in part because they feel financially insecure (Gurrentz, 2018). Therefore, millennials may feel marginalized unless churches connect with them where they are in their life experiences. Powell et al. (2017) identified this calling as *feeling with* young adults in their positive and negative life experiences.

Church leaders need to consider whether they use online platforms for supporting conversation with current and potential members, consistent with the VCC model. Y. Lee (2018) found that churches with more resources and larger attendance, and those in urban areas, were more technologically adept at engaging current and potential members.

These churches were more likely to use social media in soliciting community support, especially of younger attendees (Y. Lee, 2018). However, nonprofits (Gálvez-Rodríguez, Caba-Pérez, & López-Godoy, 2016) and Christian churches in the United States (Wirtz, Ngondo, & Poe, 2013) have used social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) and websites (i.e., blogs or those about the organization) primarily to deliver information to the community rather than as platforms to have conversations with current and potential members. One-way communication does not take full advantage of how younger generations use these online tools (Wirtz et al., 2013), thus may result in value codestruction.

Applications of VCC model in FBOs. Within the VCC model as a conceptual framework, mutual value expands through members' meaningful, productive experiences with the FBOs (Ramaswamy, 2011). Growing churches have met millennials physically, emotionally, and spiritually where they are in their life stages (Powell et al., 2017), outside of traditionally observed Sunday Christianity (McDowell, 2018) and in response, instead of reaction, to their doubting habits (Puffer, 2018). Millennials and FBOs may achieve mutual benefit when interacting through meaningful and productive experiences.

Studies on FBOs using the VCC model have emerged and provided a foundation for this study's context. Grandy and Levit (2015) identified a need for more research on applying the VCC model within religious organizations. From a VCC perspective, organizations and customers interact continually and iteratively in processes that cocreate value materially and symbolically; this perspective represents a different model from the demand versus supply value model (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014).

In a qualitative case study of a Canadian Christian church, St. Mark's, Grandy and Levit (2015) interviewed 23 church leaders and members (active and less active) to learn how the church cocreated value with stakeholders. Instead of members' merely worshipping on Sundays to "consume" sermons, they were involved in designing and delivering activities (Grandy & Levit, 2015). The parish youth engaged in church life through diverse activities: teaching, reading, assisting with communion, teaching Sunday school, and leading the fall fair (Grandy & Levit, 2015). Parish youth took an active role in the church's functioning that enhanced their engagement (Grandy & Levit, 2015). The parish continually demonstrated welcoming and openness without judgment, regardless of race, gender, or sexual identity (Grandy & Levit, 2015). Members, invited to write prayers for the parish, cocreated value by authoring messages conveying dignity for all rather than choosing words from a book of worship (Grandy & Levit, 2015). Church leaders' sensitivity toward members' needs materialized as members' interacting in a reciprocal engagement toward the church's mission (Grandy & Levit, 2015). Members' involvement cultivated a sense of belonging, built a culture of community, and fostered shared leadership, all of which represent key tenets of VCC (Grandy & Levit, 2015).

In cocreation of value, customers' perceived value is unique and contextual to their situation. Gallan et al. (2019) assessed the interconnectedness of community members in improving a patient's well-being. Justine, a 72-year-old woman, was assisted by community members in her recovery from a hip replacement. Gallan et al. found that VCC emerged according to the ways members contributed to supporting Justine: Church members felt fulfilled because they supported community needs;

Justine's family increased their productivity by saving time dedicated to Justine's therapy; and Justine's medical providers felt successful working with social workers to find a beneficial treatment plan for Justine.

Using the VCC model within strategic marketing, Gbadamosi (2019) studied how spirituality guided religious, entrepreneurial women in cocreating value with their customers and their churches. Gbadamosi (2019) argued that culture was critical to how people engaged in their life pursuits. Gbadamosi conducted interviews and focus groups with 17 African women in London to understand the influence of faith, social, and economic factors on female entrepreneurs. Despite the challenge of societal demands and criticism of their gender, the women allowed God, their Pentecostal faith, and the church to guide them in their businesses, taking ethical stances in treating customers properly and selling products fairly (Gbadamosi, 2019). Using lessons that they learned from church programs, the women developed relationships with people outside the church and deepened them with church members, who patronized their businesses and suggested improvements to help them (Gbadamosi, 2019).

Understanding the VCC model as a valid lens for engagement, church leaders might benefit by assessing their religious market, meeting their current and potential members' needs, providing resources to the community, and continuing to innovate and provide attractive commodities. Engagement between providers and consumers is the key to VCC (Quach & Thaichon, 2017). Value cocreation and engagement share common characteristics: They build on iterative processes, rely on interactive experiences, and result in mutually beneficial outcomes (Conduit & Chen, 2017). Figure

3 provides an example process that incorporates VCC outcomes between FBOs and current and potential members on engagement platforms, resulting in mutually beneficial value.

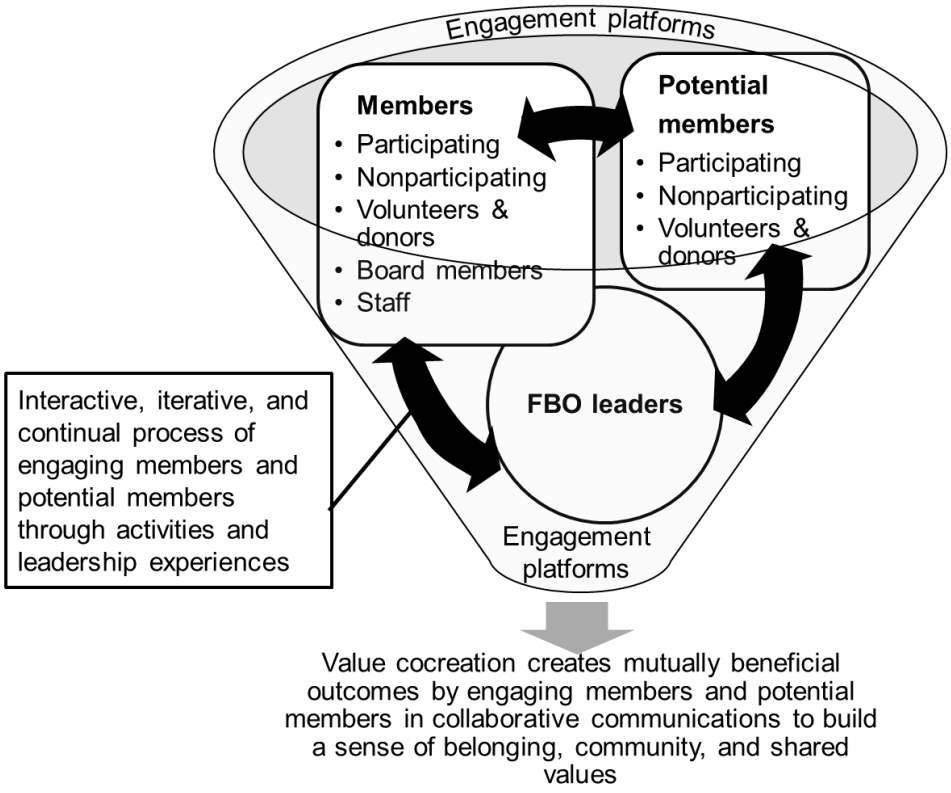

Figure 3. Proposed process of cocreating value between faith-based organizations, members, and potential members on engagement platforms.

By supporting potential members' searches for community identity, belonging, and shared responsibility, FBOs can build and strengthen relationships with millennials. Brown (2016) conducted focus group studies with American young adults (aged 18–29) in the Southeast United States and found that the positive relationships they had with peers, siblings, parents, pastors, and members of older generations contributed to their retention in the church in the following ways:

- siblings and peers inside and outside the church nurtured faith by providing accountability and mentoring young adults;
- siblings were a beacon when the young adults strayed from participation;
- church leaders served as guides for young adults; and
- older church members became mentors and friends to them (Brown, 2016).

In a survey of 590 Northeastern U.S. Presbyterian volunteers, Kang (2016) found that volunteers' engagement increased when they identified with the mission and felt satisfied by their loyalty, sense of belonging, and joy in the work. Older volunteers were more likely to feel belonging and engagement than younger volunteers (Kang, 2016). Younger volunteers were more likely to engage when empowered, recognized, and assigned independent tasks (Kang, 2016).

Puffer (2018) studied millennials who questioned their faith and became dissatisfied to the point of leaving their churches. Puffer found that FBO leaders likely did not engage optimally with millennials, reacting in alarm rather than responding in grace to their needs. Järvi et al. (2018) identified the failure to adapt to stakeholders' needs as being an antecedent to value codestruction. Leaders risk cultivating value codestruction if they fail to prepare millennials by helping them discover what Hansen (2019) called "a faith that works in real life." Powell et al. (2017) suggested that church programs could help young people navigate the social pressures of peers and popular culture. In this next part, I discuss recent research on successful engagement of young adults in FBOs.

Potential Solutions Used by Growing Faith-Based Organizations

Millennials have engaged in religious communities when empowered (Kang, 2016), when welcomed as they are (Powell et al., 2017), and when feeling connected with other members (Brown, 2016; Powell et al., 2017). Some churches in the Emerging Church movement (ECM) have thrived and grown because they engage millennials (Moody & Reed, 2017). Others have grown within Christianity but outside of the ECM. Thriving churches meet their religious markets' needs, provide clearly established beliefs, have a *missional* focus, innovate practices continually, develop leaders at all levels, support intergenerational programming, and prioritize youth and young adult engagement (see sources within Figure 5). Churches with a missional focus recognize the personal, social, and divine (beyond human measures) influences in their organizational success (Thiessen et al., 2019). They also break the boundaries of their traditional church walls to reach the people "in the cracks and crevices" of society to share Jesus's message (Burge & Djupe, 2015).

Innovating without abandoning the religious market. Growing churches adapt to meet the needs of their religious markets without abandoning their theological beliefs. Iannaccone (1994) contended that church growth depended on an optimal level of congregational strictness or exclusivity that is associated with conservative theological beliefs and practices. However, Ferguson (2014) clarified Iannoccone's interpretation of optimal strictness contributing to church growth. In a quantitative study of 2,565 liberal, 3,263 moderate, and 3,610 conservative U.S. congregational attendees, Ferguson (2014) found that there were limits to an optimal level of strictness or conservative belief

contributing to church growth. As shown in Figure 4, Ferguson clarified that, regardless of theological adherence to the Bible as a liberal, moderate, or conservative church, a church's growth was contingent on its alignment with the strictness expected by its target religious market, or religious niche.

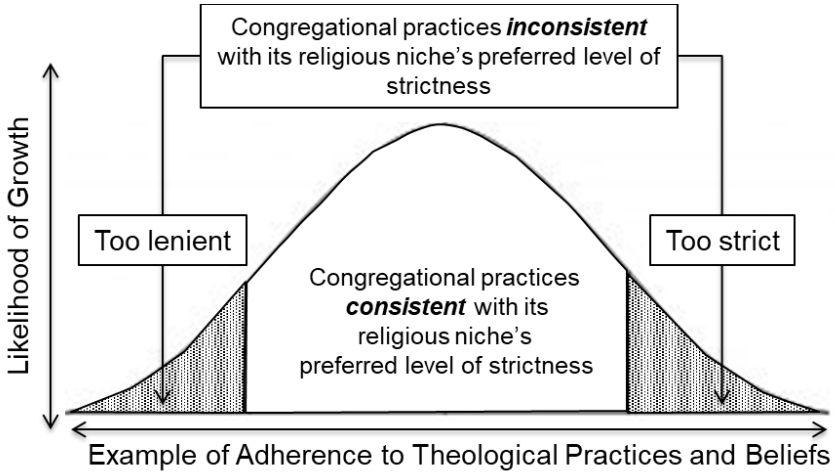

Figure 4. Likelihood of growth when innovating practices according to a congregational religious niche's preferred level of strictness, regardless of theological beliefs. Information adapted from Ferguson (2014) and Iannaccone (1994).

Growing churches have innovated in their practices to meet their participants' needs (Bloom, 2016; Grandy & Levit, 2015; Powell et al., 2017; Thiessen et al., 2019). Depending on the degree to which they adhere to their beliefs and practices as they meet a religious market's needs, churches might attempt to change their structures, programs, or practices when soliciting new members (Ferguson, 2014). Churches may be more likely to experience decline when adapting practices that are out of alignment with their attendees' expected level of strictness regarding beliefs and practices (Ferguson, 2014), as shown in the shaded regions of Figure 4. Ferguson provided the example of religiously liberal, moderate, and conservative churches that tried anti-alcohol actions

(e.g., discussions on the topic and switching from providing wine with communion to providing juice) to attract more conservative members. Ferguson found that conservative and moderate churches were 73% and 55% more likely to experience growth, respectively, than liberal churches, perhaps because changes were outside of liberal churches' expected practices. Thus, attendees' preferences for beliefs, practices, and church characteristics are an essential element in determining adaptations for church growth. Growing churches may not necessarily abandon their traditions to attract younger people but instead may innovate within their religious niche to offer an authentic approach to the Gospel.

Emerging Church movement. Within the ECM, churches have sought to innovate practices in adapting to their local communities' needs and culture. The ECM grew out of the constraints built into institutional churches (Burge & Djupe, 2017; M. Guest, 2017; Martí, 2017). The movement often caters to the anti-institutional (Packard, 2012) and religious who are still searching for an authentic approach to their faith (Martí, 2017). Marshall and Olson (2018) and Williams et al. (2016) found millennials to be anti-institutional; thus, the ECM may attract more millennials.

Emerging Church attendees have been mostly young, highly educated, middle class, and white (Burge & Djupe, 2017; Martí, 2017); nearly 70% of the emerging Christians were age 35 years or younger (Martí & Ganiel, 2014). The ECM has grown with an anti-institutional impetus as framed by its conservative evangelical church heritage (M. Guest, 2017; Hunt, 2008), clergy with some denominational heritage (Burge & Djupe, 2015), and attendees' desire to distance themselves from consumer-oriented

megachurches (M. Guest, 2017; Studebaker & Beach, 2012). The ECM in America arose according to diversity in location and people (urban and suburban) and leaders' willingness to adapt to their attendees' needs (Burge & Djupe, 2015). Burge and Djupe (2015) described the ECM as not having differed drastically from denominational affiliates; denominational leaders were inclusive and open to faith exploration through limited forums, whereas ECM leaders permitted these forums to greater extents.

Millennials may have not attended most traditional churches because churches do not meet them where they are. Through music festivals and nonstandard, secular venues, hardcore punk, goth, and rock bands have served as a ministry and united many youth and adults with their messages of faith and acceptance to kids on the fringes (McDowell, 2018). The ECM has reached the unchurched by fostering safe spaces for those previously alienated from Christianity (S. Chan, 2009; M. Guest, 2017). Many hardcore punk Christians reimagined the church as being within the people, wherever they are, representing a vision of waking up the sleeping church to welcome people they have previously cast aside (McDowell, 2018). The ECM has challenged conventional Christianity's approach to conducting worship and discipleship through its innovations regarding restructuring where church occurs, communicating the church's message, and returning to the Gospel teachings of Jesus (S. Chan, 2009; Hunt, 2008). ECM attendees have not focused on expressing faith solely in religious institutions (Studebaker & Beach, 2012) or in practicing Sunday Christianity (McDowell, 2018). They assemble dynamically online (Martí, 2017) and in opportunistic physical spaces, including bars, coffee houses, and shopping malls (Martí, 2017; Studebaker & Beach, 2012). Thus, the

ECM includes examples of growing churches that are able to engage millennials because of their willingness to adapt and innovate to meet young adults where they are, physically and spiritually.

The open dialogue that the ECM welcomes with other believers could be a critical piece to why the movement is successful with millennials who doubt their faith. The ECM emphasizes Christianity as an ongoing conversation of questioning and talking about what faith means in a contemporary environment (M. Guest, 2017; Martí & Ganiel, 2014). Millennials' doubting behaviors occur when they consider existential questions regarding their religion and beliefs (Puffer, 2018). Grad (2017) suggested that communication strategies with younger people should include authentic story-telling approaches, such that young people become attracted to organizations' missions. Leaders can develop communication strategies to equip young adults with in-depth knowledge about their faith that can help them when peers reinforce their doubts. Kolodinsky, Ritchie, and Kuna (2018) found that, along with leadership support, millennials' feeling "called" (that is, to a divine, societal, or individualistic calling) was critical to their engagement in meaningful work in FBOs. The ECM treats Christianity as a nondogmatic conversation for encouraging dialogue; loving attitudes replace judgmental arguments meant to convert (Hunt, 2008). The ECM permits continual deconstructing of conventional Christianity through dialogue (Martí, 2017) without wholesale departure from Christianity (Bielo, 2017). The ECM has emphasized shifting from "dying modernity" to postmodern practices adaptable to the relevant culture (S. Chan, 2009; M. Guest, 2017; Hunt, 2008). Thus, the ECM represents a supportive environment in which

millennials can question their faith without judgment and receive support to find their calling.

Evidence of growing churches outside of the ECM. Some Protestant churches have grown outside of the ECM. Such growing churches include a few mainline churches with conservative practices (Haskell, Flatt, & Burgoyne, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2015), evangelical denominational churches, and large nondenominational churches (Powell et al., 2017). The growing denominational and nondenominational churches have had low barriers to joining (Chaves & Anderson, 2014; von der Ruhr & Daniels, 2012), sometimes attracting members from progressive mainline churches (IBISWorld, 2018). Pew Research Center (2015) found that, of the sampled nondenominational churches, most either grew in attendance or remained static from 2007 to 2014. Such churches have grown when willing to innovate and adapt to their communities' needs (Bloom, 2016; Warf & Winsberg, 2010). These churches have benefited from attendees who give to their churches and commit to their vision (Bloom, 2016). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), a more than threefold increase occurred in people identifying with nondenominational churches: from 2,489,000 in 2001 to 8,032,000 in 2008.

Powell et al. (2017) conducted an extensive illustrative case study in three stages to understand how growing churches engaged young adults in church ministries. Powell et al. (2017) solicited, from Fuller Seminary's network of churches and Christian ministries, nominations for U.S. churches that (a) engaged young people ages 15–29; (b) engaged a large percentage of young people compared to congregation size; or (c) had

something exciting or missional occurring with young members but may not be growing. Powell et al.'s research questions were "What congregational practices lead to effective engagement of young people?" "How does engaging young people contribute to a thriving church?" and "What are next step processes for congregations that want to enact changes toward more effective ministry with young people?" (p. 7).

The first stage of the study was a narrowing down of the churches to those that engaged young people successfully (Powell et al., 2017). They surveyed 373 church leaders and volunteers from 259 nominated congregations (Powell et al., 2017). Powell et al. (2017) identified most nominated churches as nonaffiliated (n = 43) and affiliated Christian traditions of Baptist (n = 32), Presbyterian (n = 32), United Methodist (n = 26), Evangelical Covenant (n = 17), and Roman Catholic (n = 15). They found that churches were from all geographic census regions of the United States, but Powell et al. identified the heaviest concentrations were from the Midwest (33%), West (31%), and South (25%); community types were primarily suburban (56%) and urban (33%). Churches primarily ranged in size, according to attendance (not membership), from 250 attendees per week to 3,000, with few churches outside of this range (Powell et al., 2017).

For their second stage, Powell et al. (2017) selected from stage one, the churches most exemplary at engaging young people according to their three criteria. Powell et al. identified 41 congregations from 14 denominations, and these churches were concentrated primarily in the Midwest (29%), West (29%), South (27%), and Northeast (15%). Powell et al. found that, in addition to nonaffiliated Christian traditions (n = 7), there were five of 14 denominations in which the remaining churches clustered: Baptist

(*n* = 7), United Methodist (*n* = 4), Roman Catholic (*n* = 4), Nazarene (*n* = 3), and Evangelical Covenant (*n* = 3). Only one church had attendance of less than 100 people per week; the rest of the churches' weekly attendance numbers were 101–250 (20%), 251–500 (17%), 501–1,000 (20%), 1,000–3,000 (20%), and over 3,000 (17%); see Powell et al. (2017). They interviewed an average of 14 members from each church, for a total of 535 participants comprising 235 young adults 18 to 29 years old (born 1985–1996), 75 parents of teens and young adults, 102 youth and young adult program volunteers, and 123 church leaders (Powell et al., 2017).

For their third stage, Powell et al. (2017) selected 12 churches from the previous stage for additional analyses. These churches had engaged the most young people in relation to congregation size; were considered highly vibrant congregations, according to survey responses; and were best positioned to provide in-depth observations, interviews, documentation, and focus groups for the research team (Powell et al., 2017). The team identified 12 churches distributed in the Midwest (*n* = 3), West (*n* = 2), South (*n* = 4), and Northeast (*n* = 3), consisting of nonaffiliated Christian traditions (*n* = 2) and affiliated Baptist (*n* = 3), Assemblies of God, Evangelical Covenant, Christian Reformed, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United Methodist traditions (Powell et al., 2017). One church had fewer than 100 people per week in attendance; the other churches' weekly attendance numbers were 101–250 (*n* = 2), 251–500 (*n* = 1), 501–1,000 (*n* = 4), 1,000–3,000 (*n* = 3), and over 3,000 (*n* = 1); see Powell et al. (2017). The following paragraphs relay a synthesis of the findings from Powell et al. and other research results that reinforced their findings.

Powell et al. (2017) found that thriving churches were Jesus-centered, missional within and outside their communities, lay-leader focused, relational with youth and young adults, inviting to outsiders, and focused on programming for young people. Thriving churches lived with Jesus-centered principles, such that people's faith permeated all aspects of life, and their faith gave additional meaning to their everyday lives (McDowell, 2018; Powell et al., 2017; Studebaker & Beach, 2012). Church members overwhelmingly mentioned Jesus as central to guiding their faith and commitment to church (Powell et al., 2017). McDowell (2018) found that young American adults who committed themselves to Christ (but not through religious institutions) called themselves "Christian but not religious" yet integrated religion into their everyday lives and responsibilities. The thriving churches in Powell et al.'s (2017) study helped young adults navigate a complex world by helping them understand its difficulties, respond to cultural issues, interact with popular culture, handle peer pressure, pursue social justice, and serve others through mission outreach.

As millennials struggled with their religiosity, Puffer (2018) offered church leaders strategies to help those who may doubt their faith because of intolerance, dependence, and nonconformance. Puffer suggested that church leaders empathize with millennials by engaging in conversations and responding compassionately. By being transparent in close relationships, church leaders could probe for solutions to millennials' dissatisfaction with the church, such as inviting self-disclosure (Puffer, 2018).

Growing churches have focused on missional outreach to the local community (Bergler, 2017; Powell et al., 2017; Reimer, 2012) and provided global missional support

(Reimer, 2012). Significant emotional experiences, such as those gained from mission work, have allowed emerging adults to connect with powerful religious experiences, such as those guided by the Holy Spirit (Bergler, 2017). These experiences can occur in local communities. Lim (2017) described church leaders' attempts to convey excitement about faith using social media (e.g., by being attractional instead of missional and by encouraging people inward to church services and activities rather than outward to community service). In growing congregations, inward activities build and reinforce a strong foundational faith (Lim, 2017), and missional activities carry out the work that Jesus instructed others to do in John 13:34: "Love one another as I have loved you."

Thriving congregations have church leaders who entrust and empower all generations, including young adults, and develop leadership opportunities for them (Powell et al., 2017). Powell et al. (2017) referred to leadership teams' ability to entrust others (including young people) with responsibilities as *keychain leadership,* with leaders as the keys because of their position, access, and capabilities. Puffer (2018) suggested that church leaders offer millennials resources, then engage them in discourse on religious topics to reinforce openness (on both their parts) to questioning and exploring. The open stance to questioning shows millennials that they are partners with pastoral leaders in developing nourishing relationships and potential apprenticeships to becoming leaders (Puffer, 2018).

Successful churches relate to young people by engaging older generations in helping meet their needs (Brown, 2016; Liang & Ketcham, 2017; Powell et al., 2017). Older people met young people's physical and emotional needs by *feeling with* them in

their positive and negative life experiences (Powell et al., 2017). Intergenerational programming has provided millennials with mutual moral support through a familial-like faith community (Liang & Ketcham, 2017; Williams et al., 2016). Positive influences from parents, peers, pastors, siblings, and intergenerational relationships contributed to churches' retention of young adults (Brown, 2016). Gailliard and Davis (2017) identified the importance of members' building relationships to solidify their belonging to a congregation. Members feel valued and come to know other members, thus becoming integrated within a congregation and the broader community to the point of building friendships that continue outside of the church walls with members (Gailliard & Davis, 2017). Church communities and intergenerational programming may be examples of implementing the VCC model because members' contributions enhance each other's well-being. With the church as the engagement platform, participation may increase.

Powell et al. (2017) found that young adults thrived with a sense of belonging in congregations that had an authentic feel and warmth. Powell et al. found that young adults associated their congregation's warmth to its vibrancy more than associating the congregation's vibrancy to the effectiveness of any single program. Young adults have connected with others within church ministries, reinforcing emotional bonds in community (Brown, 2016). The church's community inspires millennials to reinforce relationships by engaging in activities. Positive, welcoming church communities have influenced young adults' engagement levels (Gailliard & Davis, 2017; Powell et al., 2017) by showing appreciation of their contributions and helping them find faith-related purposes (Liang & Ketcham, 2017). Thriving churches have committed to youth and

young adults by prioritizing their needs and interests through programming, personnel, and financial resources (Powell et al., 2017). A. Chan et al. (2015) suggested that churches (a) devote resources to attracting adults for short-term financial benefit and (b) invest resources in youth and young adult programs for long-term outcomes. These growing church examples represent opportunities for VCC with millennials because of the mutually beneficial outcomes for current and potential members. Figure 5 summarizes the essential elements and characteristics typical of growing U.S. churches as discussed in this part of the literature.

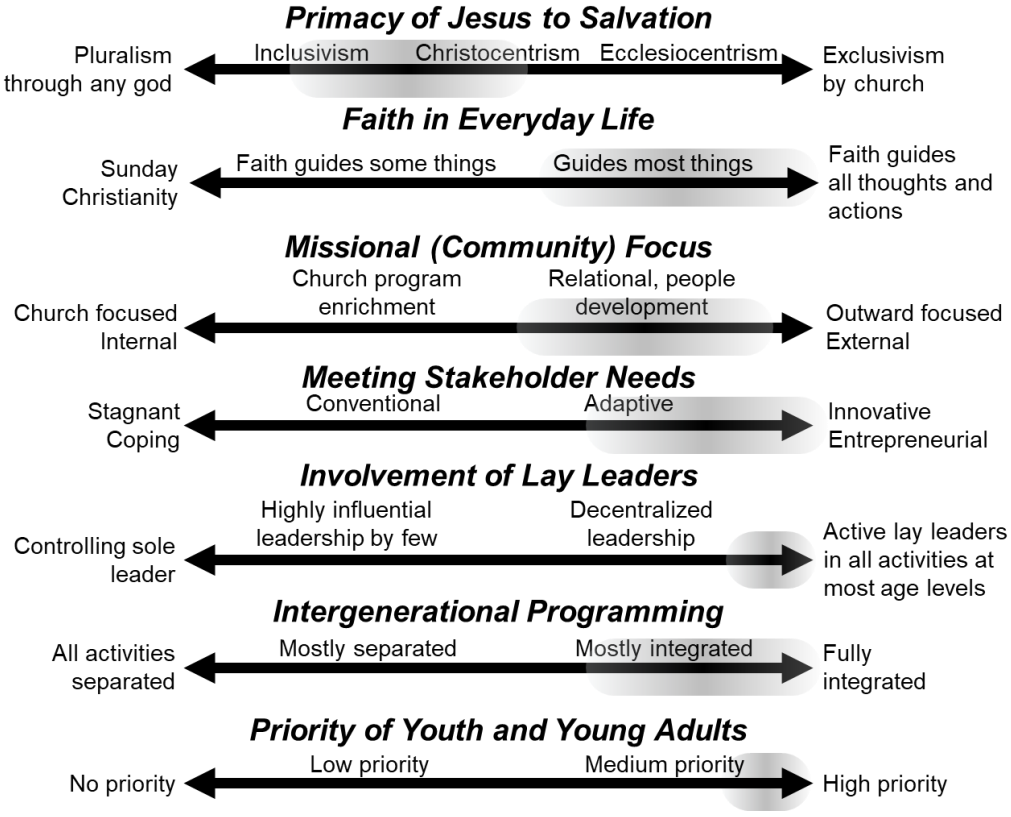

Figure 5. Ranges of Protestant churches' religious characteristics. Information for primacy of Jesus from Ferguson (2014) and Turaki (2001); information for faith in everyday life from McDowell (2018) and Powell et al. (2017); information for missional focus from Powell et al. (2017) and Thiessen et al. (2019); information for meeting

stakeholder needs from Ferguson (2014) and Thiessen et al. (2019); information for involvement of lay leaders from Powell et al. (2017) and Thiessen et al. (2019); information for intergenerational programming from Brown (2016), Powell et al. (2017), and Williams et al. (2016); and information for priority of youth and young adults from Powell et al. (2017).

Transition

Although adults have become less religious since the 1970s (Chaves, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2015; Twenge et al., 2015; Twenge et al., 2016), millennials have the lowest religiosity compared to previous generations at the same age (Twenge et al., 2015). Millennials have disaffiliated from religious institutions (Reed, 2016) and have decreased their participation in churches (M. Chan et al., 2015). Millennials' disengagement from churches represents a threat to the future viability of the churches' missions. Without participating millennials, churches have reduced abilities to fulfill their missions. However, some FBOs have demonstrated ways to engage millennials (Burge & Djupe, 2015; Powell et al., 2017). This study contributes to the literature on successful FBO leaders' strategies to engage millennials, especially through the tenets of the VCC model.

In Section 1, I provided a basis for research in an applied business study through describing the type of study; detailing the research questions, interview questions, conceptual framework, definitions, study significance, assumptions, limitations, delimitations; and providing a review of the literature. The literature review contained relevant information about millennials, their declining participation in FBOs, and a review of the VCC model as a lens for highlighting potential ways to increase millennial engagement in FBOs. In Section 2, I provide details on how I conducted the study; I

describe the research method, design, population, data collection, and ways I enhanced the reliability and validity of the study.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I provide information on the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, and population and sampling of FBOs that engaged millennials. In this section, I address how I conducted ethical research, and I discuss the data collection instruments and techniques, data organization technique, and data analysis strategy. Finally, in this section, I provide the strategies I used to enhance the reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that FBO leaders used to engage millennials. The population for the study was seven leaders in three FBOs that have implemented successful strategies for engaging millennials. The geographical location was the Western United States. The implications for positive social change for FBOs that engage millennials include the potential for FBOs' missions to expand through outreach to additional local, regional, national, or global communities. Some FBOs with increased millennial engagement might garner resources to help social ministries' longevity, enable FBO mission extension to new community populations, and thus enhance the community well-being through a variety of social programs.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, the role of the researcher is to be the instrument for collecting data (Cypress, 2017; Draper & Swift, 2011). In my qualitative study, I was the primary data collection instrument. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the human-as-instrument approach comes naturally to qualitative methods. A researcher prepares

and trains to conduct a qualitative study with data collection techniques that include interviews, observations, interpretations, and other measures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A researcher must be mindful that a human, as a research instrument, could commit errors, make flaws, and be prone to bias (Cypress, 2017). To mitigate these tendencies, researchers must identify their relationships, opinions, and beliefs about the study's topic, phenomena, organizations, and participants to understand how those influences might bias what they report (Draper & Swift, 2011).

Researcher's Relationship with the Topic

A researcher's background influences the research process, including its design, participant selection, data collection, and analysis (Morse, 2015). Reflecting on background influences in consultation with others helps a researcher to minimize bias (Morse, 2015) and maintain transparency in research processes, including interpreting results; such practices strengthen the internal validity of the study (Court & Abbas, 2013). Morse (2015) challenged researchers to clarify the different types of bias inherent in the expectations they have given their personal experiences and background so they do not obscure data collection.

As an actively involved Lutheran in Colorado, my personal lens was influenced by my upbringing, being married, having children, and serving on two Christian FBO advisory boards from 2011 to 2018. As a near millennial and near Generation X member (a cusper, as I call myself), I share some similarities with both generations. In my childhood, I experienced periods during which my divorced parents had me attend different Christian churches. In the formative period of my adolescence, however, I

attended the same Lutheran church for at least 5 years until graduating high school. I did not attend church more than six times between the ages of 18 and 28 because of feeling limited connections with others and not feeling drawn to a church similar to my home church. However, since 2008, I have maintained active membership, engagement in church programming, and discontinuous involvement on advisory boards in a Lutheran church and its associated children's center that serves the Colorado Springs community. Although I had married in 2007, my decision to start attending church again followed my starting a family.

According to Chenail (2011), researchers are likely to introduce bias when they are familiar with participants or types of organizations because of being members of similar organizations. Familiarity limits researchers' curiosity in that they may investigate only what they believe they do not know instead of discovering what they were not aware they did not know (Chenail, 2011). Researchers use reflexivity as a process throughout all phases of a study to acknowledge such bias and reflect on who they are (e.g., insider or outsider) in relation to their research topic, participants, organization type, and location (Thurairajah, 2019). My familiarity with FBOs includes both friendships and formal participation. I maintain close friendships with several Christian pastors from denominational and nondenominational affiliations. I have also worked closely with Christian FBO advisory boards, as the youngest member in some cases, and have recommended strategies to attract younger audiences.

Morse (2015) advised that researchers could seek peer review of their findings to help prevent potential biases but that researchers retain ultimate responsibility for all

results because of their familiarity with the data, research, and literature. Yin (2018) suggested that a researcher familiar with a topic needs to be open to compelling and contrary findings and avoid disregarding evidence that does not fit a researcher's preconceptions. Despite previous FBO board experience recommending strategy changes, I ensured that because of that familiarity and my age proximity to millennials I did not judge any study participants' strategies on their effectiveness in engaging people like me. Also, I am familiar with one FBO participant, a high school classmate; however, that person was an acquaintance and was not the only one from that FBO whom I interviewed. I included three FBOs in the study, and I have no familiarity with participants in the other two. Consequently, familiarity did not influence my role as a researcher.

Researcher's Role Related to Ethics and the Belmont Report Protocol

A good case study researcher follows the highest ethical standards when conducting research (Yin, 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) *Belmont Report* (1979), when involving human participants, researchers must ensure that their research is ethical by adhering to the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice for their participants. Observing these principles involves gaining informed consent for participation, minimizing risk to individuals and organizations in serving a broader societal benefit, maximizing benefits to participants and organizations, and distributing any benefits or burdens from the research equitably among participants (Ross, Iguchi, & Panicker, 2018). Researchers are responsible for protecting participating organizations by ensuring confidentiality in name and locality

(Buchanan, Boddy, & McCalman, 2013). Minimizing risk involves maintaining participants' privacy by providing them confidentiality throughout data collection and analysis processes (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). I will ensure each FBO benefits equally from study participation by providing access to a summary or verbal presentation of results after chief academic officer approval. I conducted ethical research by adhering to the *Belmont Report* protocol and principles to ensure the safety and well-being of participants.

Bias Mitigation

Researchers must remain neutral when researching topics with which they have familiarity. Novice researchers often assume they have no bias (Fusch et al., 2018). When researchers acknowledge any personal experiences that might influence their personal lens on their studies, researchers are better able to mitigate bias in interpreting participants' reflections (Fusch et al., 2018). Researchers introduce bias at different phases of a study: participant selection, participant observation, and data interpretation (Cypress, 2017). By using a reflexivity journal, implementing thick and rich data description (Morse, 2015), and triangulating data (Fusch et al., 2018), I mitigated but may not have fully eliminated bias. A reflexivity journal is a tool that can help researchers discern biases by reflecting on their predispositions (Cypress, 2017). I mitigated bias in participant selection by selecting FBOs that were outside of the Lutheran faith, from both denominational and nondenominational Protestant FBOs, in and outside of Colorado. I used a reflexivity journal to mitigate bias while selecting FBOs, interviewing participants, making observations, and interpreting data.

Researchers ensure validity through triangulation (Fusch et al., 2018) to help analyze phenomena. Through methodological triangulation, the researcher collects different data types (e.g., interviews, observations, and documents), and through data triangulation, the researcher collects one data type concerning different times, spaces, people, and the aggregate interactions between people (Denzin, 2017). I followed Yin's (2018) recommendation to collect multiple sources of evidence to triangulate data. The quantity (thickness) and quality (richness) of data pertain to the entire data set: the data type, data appropriateness, the number of interviews, and the number of participants needed to reach data saturation (Morse, 2015). I used multiple sources of evidence (i.e., interview data, observations, and online and offline documents) for the FBOs to achieve data triangulation and mitigate my bias as a researcher.

Interview Protocol Rationale

Turner (2010) acknowledged that for qualitative studies, a researcher might use interviews in conjunction with other data to support findings. Yin (2018) identified that the major strength of case study research is using multiple sources of evidence. Yin, however, highlighted that, of all the sources of evidence in a case study, interviews are one of the most essential sources because they offer an understanding of human insight into a phenomenon. Given their importance to the qualitative case study, interviews require proper preparation, execution, and follow-up. Therefore, a case study researcher develops interview protocols to establish consistency in the initial questions asked of all participants and to provide a guide to maintaining flexibility for follow-up questions (Turner, 2010). A researcher needs to listen carefully to what the interviewees state

during the interview and to report findings without bias as to what is important (Yin, 2018). Yin provided an example regarding nonprofits. Suppose a nonprofit member reports capitalistic motives despite the group's not formally making profits (Yin, 2018). In such a case, the researcher must give sufficient attention to contrary evidence and avoid disregarding the interviewee's words because of a preconception about nonprofits (Yin, 2018). I included an interview protocol (see Appendix A) for my multiple case study to maintain consistency among participants, provide flexibility for follow-up questions, and avoid introducing bias.

Participants

Eligibility Criteria

Unlike in quantitative research, qualitative researchers sample participants deliberately, thus they need to define the criteria for participant selection (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). By establishing participant eligibility criteria for settings and situations where researchers can gain access, researchers may afford themselves the greatest opportunities to gather rich data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I considered two selection criteria in answering the following research question: What strategies do FBOs' leaders use to engage millennials?

The first criterion for selecting FBOs and their participants was ensuring that candidate organizations categorized themselves as a faith-based or religious institution. The degree of religious integration delivered to stakeholders through organizational elements might have varied depending on the FBO's mission, social ministry outreach, and programming. Leadership teams steer the practices of their FBOs by integrating

religious beliefs or offering services apart from their religious beliefs (Monsma, 2002; Sider & Unruh, 2004). Bielefeld and Cleveland (2013) determined three areas that FBOs steered their practices: (a) religious expression (organization and participant self-identity), (b) religious activities and service provision, and (c) level of organizational control (through funding, decision-making, and authority). For this study, I considered FBOs eligible if they demonstrated the integration of faith through at least one of these areas. By using this strategy, I avoided selecting organizations categorized by what Sider and Unruh (2004) referred to as "faith-background" organizations, which do not incorporate faith outside of their founding or location, do not require faith commitments from staff, or do not present religious elements to beneficiaries. The strategy of ensuring that a selected organization integrates faith through at least one of Bielefeld and Cleveland's (2013) three areas eliminated secular organizations that regard religious undertones as improper in delivering services to beneficiaries (Sider & Unruh, 2004).

The second criterion for selecting study participants was identifying FBOs that have grown for the last 5 years because of engaging millennials or, if not growing, have something missional, or outward oriented, that appeals to millennials. Powell et al. (2017) studied churches that effectively engaged young people of ages 15–29. Powell et al. defined an effective church as "one that is involving and retaining young people in the congregational community, as well as helping them develop a vibrant faith in Jesus Christ" (p. 8). Thus, eligible churches in Powell et al.'s study had (a) engaged a growing number of young people, aged 15–29, (b) engaged a larger number of young people compared to the congregational size, or (c) "something exciting or missional [was] going

on with young people, but their numbers [weren't] large or growing" (p. 10). Flatt, Haskell, and Burgoyne (2018) studied growth and decline in the largest denominational mainline churches of Canada, but they did not focus on growth limited to millennials. They considered a church growing if it demonstrated an average growth rate of 2% per year over 10 years through attendance records (Flatt et al., 2018). Flatt et al. (2018) found candidate churches through phone calls and referrals from already recruited churches. For this study, I adapted Powell et al. (2017) and Flatt et al.'s (2018) criteria to locate growing churches. I relied on referrals from people who knew of FBOs that had a lot of millennials attending. I also relied on participating FBO leaders' assessment for this criterion. In this study, FBO leaders believed their FBO had grown because the leaders engaged a large number of millennials in relation to the size of the congregation.

Although not a formal criterion, it was necessary to note that FBO leaders did not necessarily document their strategies. According to Jacobs and Polito (2012), FBO leaders might not name strategies or strategy development processes that result in growth; therefore, describing successful strategies through processes, people, and services is important. Jacobs and Polito found that leaders in faith-based education and social service charities defined and measured their effectiveness by their ability to meet their communities' needs. The FBO leaders in Jacobs and Polito's study did not mention strategy development as the basis for effectiveness. Although I sought leaders from FBOs that have grown because of engaging millennials, the leaders did not necessarily present formal strategies for growth; therefore, it was vital to remain adaptable to receiving information during interviews.

Yin (2018) encouraged researchers to be adaptive to situations. When researchers maintain adaptive postures, they understand new information as opportunities instead of challenges (Yin, 2018). Grandy (2013) identified that the church in one single case study used shared leadership between clergy and members to adapt to constituents' needs. That church defined success using both highly subjective measures (spiritual growth and interactive relationship-building opportunities) and concrete measures (including design changes to the interior church and new program development) that met the community's changing needs (Grandy, 2013). Following Yin, I listened to FBO leaders who did not define their formal strategies but instead described ways in which they engaged millennials.

I sought to interview other leaders besides lead pastors within the FBOs—leaders for communications and program development. However, the leaders' availability limited whom I could interview. The primary FBO leader in each FBO, who was responsible for engaging millennials, referred me to different leaders accordingly. Thus, I interviewed two senior leaders and a pastor of young adults, director of young adults, missions director, activities director, and worship music director. Those who develop programs are important to interview, because programs help younger members reinforce their connections with others in the organization (Brown, 2016; Williams et al., 2016).

Gaining Access to Participants

Answering the research question is the goal of conducting research. Yin (2018) suggested that researchers choose the cases that answer their research questions such that they can gain sufficient access to interview people, review documents, and make field

observations. Karjalainen, Niemistö, and Hearn (2015) noted that, to answer their research questions, researchers need access to multiple documents and people at various organizational levels.

I identified two of the three FBOs by using connections (friends) on social media. The FBOs' publicly available content on social media and websites suggested increased millennial engagement. Buchanan et al. (2013) supported the strategy of using existing organizational contacts to gain access. For this study, I used my friends' connections to FBOs. Buchanan et al. found that researchers were more likely to gain access when an organizational member who had an established, trusting relationship with leaders could introduce to them the possibility of a research topic.

Some organizations self-publish information through websites and social media (Land & Taylor, 2018). Using Facebook, I learned about two FBOs from their mentions in my friends' social media updates. I contacted my friends about this study and inquired whether they could provide me with contact information for FBOs. A researcher requires contact with what Walden University considers an organizational representative to understand organization-specific approval requirements, gain access to participant information that is not publicly available, and support participant recruitment (Walden University, 2019b). Before Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I sought to understand the FBOs' approval requirements for their participation in the study. To help FBOs understand this study and communicate to me their onsite approval requirements, I implemented the protocol Yin (2018) suggested: an introductory explanation for potential participants including the study purpose, background, business problem, and promise of

confidentiality. I also shared the rationale for organization selection, potential applicability of any findings, and the university requirement for an ethics review.

For the third FBO, a friend of mine who knew of my study topic suggested that I contact an FBO member to discuss participation. I provided the member of the third FBO the introductory explanation for the study. Informing the FBOs of the pertinent introduction, purpose, and problem for the study afforded them the option not to participate in the study based on eligibility criteria.

Strategies for Establishing a Working Relationship with Participants

To gain access to an organization, a researcher must explain to its leaders the purpose of the research and the reason for interviewing people (Buchanan et al., 2013; Polkinghorne, 2005). A researcher must also build trust with participants to gather high-quality interview data (Polkinghorne, 2005). A researcher gains this trust through conversations to build rapport and answer questions participants have about the study (Polkinghorne, 2005). A researcher might build trust by providing participants the opportunity to review transcribed interviews and make changes to correct factual inaccuracies (Philipsen, 2010).

A researcher must set appropriate expectations when requesting informed consent, to address participants' concerns about the research process. Part of that reassurance is to protect the participants' confidentiality, including names and specific localities of the organizations (from data collection through data analysis) to safeguard them from individual or organizational identification in the publication of findings (Buchanan et al., 2013; Gibson et al., 2013). Assigning organizational and individual pseudonyms for data

coding helped to protect confidentiality. I established a rapport with each participant and requested documents (financial, attendance, and annual reports, for example). However, the FBO leaders did not maintain or provide financial or attendance reports and, instead, referred me to online material as available. I ensured that participants were aware of the individual and organizational time commitments necessary for interviews; follow-ups; and observations of programs, processes, or other meetings and services.

The benefit of establishing a working relationship with participants is that it might enable a researcher to gain access to additional or alternative participants; a researcher might also ask for and be provided electronic documents instead of paper documents (Yin, 2018). Specific to an FBO setting, Grandy (2013) gained consent from a church to participate in and observe church services to understand the church's culture better. Grandy triangulated findings using the church's website, financial documents, news articles, observational data, and interview data. Grandy remained transparent with participants about the use of data. Because of Grandy's transparency, participants shared positive and negative experiences. This example of transparency demonstrated how establishing a trusting relationship with participants can lead to credible findings.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Research methods available to a researcher include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Crane et al., 2018). I implemented a qualitative research method to explore leaders' strategies to increase engagement with millennials. To explore this, I sought to understand the perspectives leaders had that contributed to how they developed

their strategies within their organizations. A qualitative researcher explores the meaning of a phenomenon by understanding phenomena and events through the processes that connect them (Maxwell, 2019). Participants shed light on these processes through their value-laden context provided through dialogue, their experiences (Sarma, 2015), and constructed meanings (Yazan, 2015). I interviewed and observed specific FBO leaders and reviewed online and offline documentation from FBOs to gain insight into their strategies for engaging millennials.

I did not select a quantitative or mixed-methods approach to this study. A researcher who conducts a quantitative study focuses on selecting variables, which is an essential component of a quantitative study (Maxwell, 2019). A researcher typically uses a quantitative study to assess changes between variables by developing hypotheses (Martin & Bridgmon, 2012) and to test their hypotheses using instruments (Heale & Twycross, 2015). A quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study because I did not focus on variable selection and hypothesis-building to assess variable changes using instruments. Instead, I explored a phenomenon by interviewing FBO leaders, observing their church activities, and reviewing online and offline documentation to explore leaders' strategies for engaging millennials.

Mixed-methods studies allow researchers to implement a purposeful and strategic integration of both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer research questions through testing hypotheses and exploring the meaning behind the results, for example (Taguchi, 2018). By using a mixed-methods approach, a researcher preserves the strength of qualitative and quantitative methods (McLaughlin, Bush, & Zeeman, 2016).

A mixed-methods study requires a researcher to possess extensive knowledge of qualitative and quantitative methods and the underlying research designs (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). The mixed-methods study was not an ideal approach for this study because I did not plan to engage in the quantitative portion of the mixed-methods approach.

Research Design

Four common research designs are available for qualitative researchers: (a) case study, (b) phenomenology, (c) narrative, and (d) ethnography (Lichtman, 2014). A researcher must select a research design that offers the most appropriate strategy for answering the research question. The research question in this study was What strategies do FBOs' leaders use to engage millennials?

Case study. Case studies are appropriate for in-depth exploration of a phenomenon and the real-world context contributing to it (Cronin, 2014; Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018). A researcher can use a single or multiple case study design. A researcher must provide a strong and convincing rationale to justify a single case study (Gog, 2015; Yin, 2018). Ridder (2017) suggested that researchers use multiple case study designs to allow for increased understanding of concepts and potential advancement of theories by analyzing across individual cases to compare similarities and differences. A researcher using a multiple case study design often increases validity in the study because they sometimes strengthen the results with aggregated findings across cases (Gog, 2015; Yin, 2018). I selected a multiple case study as the most appropriate strategy to explore the

phenomenon of millennial engagement in and across several FBOs through interviews with leaders and the use of other sources of evidence relevant to the research question.

Defining a case. In this study, three FBOs comprised three cases. Case study researchers gather information relevant to a phenomenon to define their cases. A researcher defines a case as an individual, group, event, organization, or movement bounded in geography and time (Cronin, 2014; Vannoni, 2015; Yin, 2018) and requires multiple data sources to triangulate findings according to the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2018). In a case study, a researcher investigates participants' perspectives, their relationships, and the context of their interactions (Cronin, 2014). The sources in this case study included interviews; online and offline documentation; and observations of FBO services, gatherings of various sizes, and meetings. During the data collection phase, the researcher might require more interviews with individuals and require additional observations of activities than initially anticipated to reach data saturation (Cronin, 2014).

Data saturation. Researchers must interview enough participants during the data collection phase to achieve data saturation. Researchers systematically and repetitively analyze data to determine whether they reach data saturation (Cronin, 2014), thus validating construct validity of concepts for their study. Researchers aim for thematic saturation (Lowe, Norris, Farris, & Babbage, 2018) or thematic exhaustion (G. Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) as signified by a lack of new themes emerging as the interviews progress. I did not require additional interviews with multiple program leaders, but I considered that possibility in case, for example, I did not reach data saturation after

interviewing FBO leaders. It was necessary to assess cases individually to determine how the FBOs were organized, because the number of interviews per FBO varied.

Other research designs not suitable for this study. Phenomenology, narrative, and ethnography were not appropriate research designs for this study. Case study designs differ from other research designs. Researchers select a case study design when they will use a variety of evidence sources (interviews, observations, documents, and others), thus exploring a phenomenon in more depth than a single type of source allows (Yin, 2018).

In a phenomenology design, researchers inquire about what it means to experience something or be like someone (Wilson, 2015); that is, they collect data primarily through interviews with invariant constituents to understand their lived experiences in their world (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology was not an appropriate design because the interviews compose the most essential source of data, and I required more data sources than interviews alone to explore the phenomenon.

In a narrative design, a researcher explores a historical event, a sequence of events (Petty et al., 2012), or the life of one or more persons through stories (Lichtman, 2014). Narrative researchers have an interest in an individual and his or her temporal, lived experience (Elliott, 2005); that is, they collect data to learn about historical or personal events primarily through first-hand accounts (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). A narrative design was not appropriate for this study because it requires collecting data primarily through first-hand accounts; I required additional data sources to explore the phenomenon.

Researchers use ethnography to understand cultures and social situations through first-hand interactions and immersion (Ryan, 2017; Sangasubana, 2011). Ethnographic researchers participate in the lives and cultures of those they study over extended time periods to experience their world, document their constructed realities, and analyze their perspectives (Ryan, 2017; Sangasubana, 2011). Ethnography was not appropriate for this study because I studied multiple leaders' strategies to engage millennials rather than becoming immersed in each organization's culture.

Population and Sampling

Sampling Method

For this multiple case study, I used a purposeful, nonrandom sampling method and selected FBOs whose leaders believed the FBO had grown by engaging a large number of millennials in relation to the size of the congregation. Researchers have the option of either random sampling, commonly used in quantitative studies, or nonrandom sampling, commonly used in qualitative studies (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Researchers use nonrandom, purposeful strategies to deliberately sample participants who they believe are most knowledgeable in answering the research question with the richest information (Cypress, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Probability sampling, typically involving random participant selection, is often associated with quantitative research and generalizing statistically from a sample to a population (Draper & Swift, 2011; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). However, probability sampling was not appropriate for this study because of this study's use of a smaller sample size that was not generalizable to a target population.

I implemented a criterion sampling strategy. Researchers may use an iterative approach to sampling to include combining sampling strategies, if appropriate for their research design (Harsh, 2011; Palinkas et al., 2015; Polkinghorne, 2005). Criterion sampling is appropriate when identifying and selecting participants according to important predetermined criteria (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015; Polkinghorne, 2005). The FBO leaders included in this study were two senior leaders and a pastor of young adults, director of young adults, missions director, activities director, and worship music director, all from FBOs that have grown by engaging a large number of millennials in relation to the size of the congregation.

Number of Participants and Data Saturation

I interviewed seven leaders in the three FBOs comprising the three cases. Researchers need to determine the number of cases to use in their study depending on their desired level of certainty across case findings and their consideration of rival explanations in multiple cases (Yin, 2018). Morse (2015) explained the difficulty in predetermining sample size in qualitative studies because of complexities associated with phenomena. The number and variety of interviews, observations, and cases in qualitative research help researchers ensure they obtain rich data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Therefore, the number of participants chosen depends on the data collection technique and the richness of information obtainable from potential participants to address the phenomenon (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I remained flexible to interviewing multiple leaders during the data collection phase to obtain the variety in interviews that contributed to rich data.

I achieved data saturation by interviewing participants from each FBO until no new themes or data emerged as interviews progressed. From the FBOs, I interviewed two senior leaders and a pastor of young adults, director of young adults, missions director, activities director, and worship music director. Each leader had been designated by each FBO representative as having influenced millennial engagement. Cypress (2018) recommended that qualitative researchers concurrently sample, collect, and analyze until reaching data saturation, meaning that few new themes, if any, develop during data collection. Moser and Korstjens (2018) concluded that researchers have the responsibility of extending sampling, if needed, to reach data saturation. Saunders and Townsend (2016) noted the difficulty in pinpointing the precise number of participants needed in case studies to reach data saturation. I continued sampling from each FBO until reaching data saturation.

Participant Criteria and Interview Setting

Moser and Korstjens (2018) stated that researchers must select the setting and situations that provide them with the richest information on the phenomenon. Fusch et al. (2018) described rich data as being of high quality rather than high quantity. For Grandy (2013), gathering rich data was helped by a senior church leader who identified congregants for participation and provided access to the church for limited on-site observations and interviews. Morse (2015) identified the need to collect data from participants in a setting that permits time to establish trust and thus allows for rich data collection. Interviewing participants in a setting of their choosing might help. I interviewed FBO leaders at onsite locations of convenience to them.

Ethical Research

Walden University's (2019b) Office of Research Ethics and Compliance requires that students obtain IRB approval before collecting data. Before Walden IRB approval, my contact with organizations occurred through an FBO representative, who in all cases was the FBO leader. I sent FBO representatives a letter of cooperation, in the returned final versions of which they identified potential FBO leader participants (responsible for engaging millennials), candidate observation events, and sample documentation they might provide during my onsite visits. Until receiving IRB approval, I coordinated with each contact in their role as the FBO representative. After receiving IRB approval (approval number 01-28-20-0747535) and all final letters of cooperation, I invited the FBO leaders to participate in the study and obtained their consent to be participants through the FBO leader participant invitation and consent form. I reviewed, addressed, and adhered to the research-related guidelines provided by the Walden University IRB and student code of ethics. In doing so, I conducted this study and its associated activities ethically.

Informed Consent Process

One aspect of adhering to the *Belmont Report's* principle of respect for individuals is for a researcher to obtain voluntary informed consent from each participant before interviews commence (Ross et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). The *Belmont Report* contains three elements for researchers to follow as part of obtaining informed consent from participants: Provide information, establish comprehension, and gain voluntary participation through documenting informed consent (U.S. Department of HHS, 1979).

Through the informed consent process, a researcher explains to participants the study objectives, expectations for participation, use of interview data, confidentiality of data, and other information that could help participants make an informed decision whether to participate (Cypress, 2018; Fassinger & Morrow, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Ross et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). Written consent indicates participants' understanding that their participation is voluntary (Cypress, 2018; Ross et al., 2018). Depending on the nature of the study, a researcher may use a participant's verbal or written consent. I obtained verbal consent from all participants before proceeding with interviews.

Protecting Confidentiality of Participants

To ensure that I retained participants' confidentiality, I used the following pseudonym convention for the three FBOs and their participating leaders, abbreviating the pseudonym and adding a number (1, 2, or 3) for each participant from that church:

- Organization 1 was Mercy Rapids (MR) Church, and its participants were MR1 and MR2.
- Organization 2 was New Bridge (NB) Church, and its participants were NB1 and NB2.
- Organization 3 was Growing Roots (GR) Church, and its participants were GR1, GR2, and GR3.

I generalized FBO locations and their target audiences so they could not be determined indirectly. A researcher must heavily redact some names and location information about organizations and participants to protect their identities, while providing sufficient descriptions to conduct a study (Ross et al., 2018).

I protected the confidentiality of participants, a different task than protecting participants' anonymity. Allen and Wiles (2016) differentiated the two by defining confidentiality as the researcher's knowing the participant's identity but not disclosing it and anonymity as the degree to which even the researcher cannot extricate participants' identities. Redacting interview transcripts by using pseudonyms instead of the actual names of participants and organizations is a method used by researchers to protect participants' confidentiality (Firmin, Markum, Stultz, Johnson, & Garland, 2016; Taguchi, 2018; Wigner, 2018). I did not have a third party assist with data processing; thus, a confidentiality agreement was not needed. As the only researcher, I protected participants' confidentiality by maintaining data files separately from a file with the password-protected code list (which contained the participant's organization, position, and pseudonym assigned after I obtained verbal consent). Additionally, I password protected and stored all electronic data files, which I will maintain securely for 5 years on an encrypted, stand-alone hard drive. After 5 years, I will permanently delete temporary and backup files from the stand-alone hard drive.

Participant Withdrawal Procedure

One challenge in the data collection process is a participant's desire to withdraw from the study. Nevertheless, participants may withdraw at any time during the study (U.S. Department of HHS, 1979), including during data collection (Cypress, 2018) and afterward (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Philipsen (2010), for example, experienced a participant's withdrawal after data collection, during member checks with participants. A participant may withdraw from the study through written or verbal notice. I documented

the withdrawal process in the participant invitation and consent form. No participants withdrew from this study.

Incentives for Participation

Participation in this study was voluntary; therefore, participants did not receive any financial incentives for participating. Robinson (2014) noted alternatives to financial incentives that participants may find beneficial to their participation in a study: (a) receipt of a copy of the findings or (b) benefit to the broader population through the research.

Ethical Protection of Participants

I followed basic ethical principles, as stated in the *Belmont Report* (U.S. Department of HHS, 1979) and required by Walden University. I completed Walden University's recommended research ethics and compliance training: the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program's Human Subjects Protection Training Module. (The official completion certificate is located at Appendix B.) Thus, to ensure the ethical protection of participants (individuals and organizations), I adhered to the following principles of the *Belmont Report*:

Respect. According to the principle of respect, a researcher must treat individuals as autonomous agents and protect those who do not have full autonomous capacity given their circumstances, illness, or developmental stage. Thus, I acknowledged all people in this study by respecting individual autonomy. If encountering people with diminished or limited autonomy, I respected, protected, or excluded them from research, as necessary. I informed all individuals of the research intent and potential risks of harm, answered their

questions about participation in the study, and respected their right to choose whether to continue.

Beneficence. According to the principle of beneficence, a researcher must minimize individuals' risk of harm and maximize possible benefits to them while making efforts to secure their well-being beyond a strict obligation. Ross et al. (2018) stated that promoting good was part of beneficence. Thus, I treated all persons in this study in an ethical manner by safeguarding their well-being throughout the research process. I extended the benefits of my research to organizations, where possible, by exposing useful knowledge the study may reveal. Beyond obligation, I offered charity and kindness, where possible. I minimized individuals' risk of harm from participation in the study by maintaining their privacy and confidentiality.

Justice. According to the principle of justice, researchers must fairly distribute burdens and benefits of research. I applied fair procedures for selecting FBOs, and I equitably distributed the benefits and burdens of research across FBOs. Ross et al. (2018) recommended that researchers adhere to the justice mandate of the *Belmont Report* by selecting participants according to the anticipated outcomes of the study and not their easy access or availability.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research (Cypress, 2017). Thus, as the sole researcher, I collected the data for this study, which included interviews, observations, and online and offline documentation. A case study researcher collects data from multiple sources to ensure a sufficient description of a

phenomenon (Cypress, 2018; Yazan, 2015). Instead of multiple data sources, Yin (2018) specified collecting multiples sources of evidence to substantiate findings. Yin identified the six most common sources of evidence as interviews, documentation, direct observations, participant observation, archival records, and physical artifacts. For this study, I collected multiple sources of evidence from interviews, observations, and online and offline documentation specific to the FBOs to gain insight into the leaders' strategies for engaging millennials.

Interviews

I conducted semistructured interviews with participants in this study. A researcher conducts interviews that comprise conversations with participants for gleaning their knowledgeable and meaningful perspectives on a phenomenon (Cypress, 2018). Semistructured interviews help to standardize the open-ended questions asked of all participants while allowing for follow-up questions that depend on individual participants' responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview guides (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) or protocols assist with establishing a consistent interview process for all participants (Turner, 2010). I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) that contained an introduction, interview questions, and closing script to provide consistency when interviewing participants.

Documentation

Documents and records represent nonhuman data sources and may be available publicly or privately (Cypress, 2018). Baxter and Jack (2008) recommended collecting key documents from an organization for use in a case study. Yin (2018) identified

documentation (electronic or paper) as relevant to most case studies, and something researchers should gather during data collection to corroborate other sources of evidence. Yin categorized documentation as personal (emails, diaries, and calendars); event-related (agendas, meeting minutes, and event reports); administrative (proposals and progress reports); evaluation-based or study-related; and publicly available news. Cypress (2018) categorized documentation similar to Yin and added other types, including media from websites, social media, telephone records, and digital archives. Yin considered archival records a separate source of evidence although its advantages and disadvantages for use aligned with documentation's use. According to Yin, examples of archival records include organizational records (services, budget, clients, or personnel) produced over a given period. Unlike documentation, archival records vary in usefulness by case study and can become burdensome to retrieve and analyze because of the extensive source of quantitative data (Yin, 2018). To overcome this burden, Yin recommended focusing on the most salient information to the case study. Leaders in this study did not provide archival records. Instead I reviewed documentation online (videos, social media sites, and primary and suborganizational websites) and offline (worship bulletins, informational handouts, meeting notes, and FBO leaders' published books). Yin (2018) identified documents as helping researchers make inferences about participants' titles and organizational communications, processes, or structure, which they might later corroborate with interviews.

Direct Observations

Observations consist of a researcher's watching participants' interactions, environments, conversations, activities, and behaviors to witness a phenomenon firsthand (Cypress, 2018) and discover additional information about it (Yin, 2018). To remain truthful to the phenomenon and context, Cypress recommended that a researcher conduct observations overtly and in their natural setting. A researcher may use field notes to describe observations, including the order and content of activities (Haskell & Flatt, 2015). Observations may comprise formal or informal data collection events (Yin, 2018). Formal events can include meetings and other events, and informal observations can include any notes taken throughout fieldwork, such as notes about a participant's office decorations (Yin, 2018). For this study, I observed FBOs' worship services, worship events with music, various-sized group gatherings, informational meetings, and leadership meetings.

Enhancing the Reliability and Validity of the Data Collection Instruments

There were three strategies I used to enhance the reliability of my study during the planning, data collecting, and data processing phases. First, Yin (2018) recommended that a researcher develop a case study protocol, which includes data collection procedures and an interview protocol (see Appendix A). Developing a case study protocol for this study helped me maintain consistency in collecting data. Second, to store data, Yin (2018) recommended that a researcher maintain a case study database, which is a database devoted solely to the case study, to increase the reliability of the study, because the database contains a repository for all sources of evidence. Thus, I stored securely all

collected data in a case study database to enhance reliability. Last, member checking enhances the credibility of the collected data by the researcher's having participants check the collected interview data and interpretations for errors or misconceptions (Cypress, 2017; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). Therefore, I followed up with participants to have them review syntheses of their individual material. I asked them if the material represented an accurate analysis of the interviews and offered them the opportunity to add missed information.

To enhance the validity of a study, Yin (2018) recommended that a researcher create a chain of evidence, corroborating data through multiple sources, which would help a reader to trace the evidence from collection to findings. Diefenbach (2009) and Fusch et al. (2018) recommended that researchers corroborate their findings through different data collection methods within the same research design (e.g., interviews, observations, documents, etc.) to achieve methodological triangulation. I enhanced validity in this study by collecting three different data types (interviews, documents, and observations), from multiple FBOs (at different geographical locations) and from various people with similar positions at each FBO. I also collected online and offline organizational documentation.

Data Collection Technique

To answer the question *What strategies do FBO leaders use to engage millennials?* I collected data by interviewing FBO leaders, reviewing FBO documentation online and offline, and observing FBO leaders engaging millennials during events. I familiarized myself with each FBO by reviewing its social media and

websites (including suborganizational sites, as applicable) before collecting onsite data. I obtained the leaders' approval to observe specific FBO activities as a bystander and to participate in worship services. These observations demonstrated engagement with millennials, occurred within the same time frame as onsite data collection, and tracked activities that the leaders recommended. Below I describe these data collection techniques and then discuss their advantages and disadvantages.

Interviews

Semistructured interviews are those for which a researcher predetermines the questions to be asked of all participants and then seeks clarification through follow-up questions, as needed (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Follow-up questions allow a researcher to probe for additional information related to the participants' answers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Advantages of using semistructured interviews include the ability to ask open-ended questions, vary the order of questions depending on the direction of the interview, and probe in new directions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). A disadvantage of semistructured interviews is that a novice researcher may neglect asking follow-up questions, potentially omitting some data (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Of all sources of evidence, Yin (2018) highlighted the interview as being the most essential because of the human insight that a researcher can gain into a phenomenon with the strategy. Thus, interviews require proper preparation, execution, and follow-up.

Interview preparation. To prepare for interviewing participants, I emailed FBO leaders a participant invitation and consent form containing a cursory overview of the study purpose, a sample of interview questions, and consent form. Ahead of an

interview, I asked the FBO leaders if they had facilities to accommodate the interviews, such as a private room with a closeable door. Interview sites should be free of distractions (Doody & Noonan, 2013), including bright lights and loud noises (McNamara, n.d.). Interviews took place at FBO leaders' onsite locations in private rooms. After each interview, I returned to my car to document my thoughts through reflexive journaling.

Using a reflexive journal allows a researcher to examine and document how explicit and implicit assumptions and values influence decisions and feelings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). When Whitney (2018) interviewed Protestant ministers to study their writing practices, she used reflexive journaling to write her thoughts. She documented her feelings of comfort for the beliefs she shared with participants as a Christian and the discomforts she felt as a Lutheran with how some ministers asked about her personal life, prayed with her, for her, and what they prayed for regarding her (Whitney, 2018). My practice of reflexive journaling after each interview and observation minimized my bias by documenting feelings about what I heard or observed. I documented some of these feelings in the section on Reflections.

Interview process. I accommodated participants' schedules. I met each participant at their FBO and greeted them. I made every effort to ensure that the person was comfortable and free from distractions by asking each to silence any phone, if possible, before beginning the interview.

Interview protocol. The interview protocol establishes a process consistent for all participants (Turner, 2010) and is embedded within the case study protocol (Yin,

2018). The interview protocol serves two purposes for researchers: to introduce the purpose of the study to participants and to list the interview questions (Rabionet, 2011). Before collecting data, I recorded verbal consent from all participants. I embedded the informed consent process in the introduction of my interview protocol. Interview protocols should include the purpose of the study, a reminder of the informed consent, and an overview of the researcher's use of recording devices, as applicable (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Yin, 2018). I followed Polkinghorne's (2005) recommendation to answer questions participants have about the study before proceeding with interviews.

Establishing a participant's comfort at the beginning of an interview is crucial to obtaining a free-flowing conversation. Beginning with questions about sociodemographic information helps to ease the participant into the interviewing process and build conversational rapport (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rabionet, 2011). During interviews, I remembered Yin's (2018) recommendation to listen carefully to the information that participants provided and not to disregard information during the interview because of any biases of mine. I may have otherwise missed the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. Using a script for the end of interviews helps a researcher to conclude the interview smoothly and provide instructions and contact information to participants for follow-up (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Yin, 2018). I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) with an opening and closing script, sociodemographic questions, and primary and potential follow-up questions to guide the interview process.

Member Checking

I provided participants the opportunity to review the thematic analysis of their interview through member checking. After I transcribed interviews and analyzed some the interview content, I emailed individual participants my summaries and interpretations of answered questions. I offered each FBO leader an opportunity to discuss and clarify the information during our follow-up telephone calls, which occurred within 7 days of the original interview. I incorporated recommended clarifications or new information as requested by the FBO leaders. Member checking is a strategy for enhancing the credibility of the collected data, in which a researcher checks collected interview data and interpretations with participants (Cypress, 2017; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). Morse (2015) recommended member checking as a strategy for clarifying information between participants concurrent with data collection. Morse did not recommend member checking of interpretive analyses across disparate cases, for example, because a participant might not recognize individual material from the synthesized text. In returning to participants for member checking, if a participant has withdrawn (Philipsen, 2010), the researcher must consider how the withdrawal could influence a case's validity given the available data and whether additional participants might be available to fill the data gap.

Other Data Sources

Besides collecting data from interviews, I reviewed online and offline documentation and observed FBO activities. When conducting a case study, P. Smith (2018) recommended using documents and observations to support accounts provided in

interviews. Ahead of visiting FBOs to interview participants, I reviewed the FBOs' publicly available websites and observed the types of interactions available on social media. Yin (2018) cautioned researchers to set time limits because of the volume of available information from social media. Churches use social media to enable peoples' engagement by sharing videos, messages, sermons, and images and promoting opportunities for community outreach (Y. Lee, 2018; Lim, 2017; Webb, 2012). Thus, depending on how churches use online platforms, social media may allow a researcher to observe ways that churches interact with their community.

I requested documentation not publicly available that the FBOs may have archived in the last 5 years, for use as archival records. However, the FBO leaders did not provide or did not collect such documentation. Yin (2018) highlighted the advantage of documentation, including archival records, as a source that is generally unobtrusive (except for the initial retrieval); specific (referencing organizational details); and broad (spanning time, events, or programs). However, organizations produce documentation (e.g., archival records) for their purposes and with audiences (stakeholders) outside a researcher's purview (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2018). Thus, documentation and archival records may (a) reflect the originator's bias as to what they want to report to their stakeholders, (b) be provided selectively by some organizations, and (c) prove difficult to retrieve from some organizations (Yin, 2018). Thus, Yin recommended corroborating documentary evidence with other data sources, including interviews, when possible.

I requested permission to observe various activities at each FBO's environment. Grandy (2013) collected data by observing and participating in a church's events,

including services and faith groups, to understand the church's culture. I observed the programs, meetings, and services of each FBO in which they demonstrated engagement with millennials. The focus of the observations was the FBO leaders. In the invitation and consent form, I asked FBO leaders for permission to observe them in events that best demonstrate their leading of millennial engagement. The observation protocol (see Appendix C) was flexible, to account for a variety of event types. When observing FBO leaders engaging millennials through small groups, I did not record individual or identifiable behaviors of anyone other than the FBO leaders who had signed consent forms. A *complete observer,* as noted by Moser and Korstjens (2018), does not participate in activities during observations but instead assumes a bystander role. However, leaders gave me permission to participate in their FBOs' worship services. I prepared for the different types of observation activities by planning observation protocols (see Appendix C) for each event type. Powell et al. (2017) studied American churches that effectively engaged young people of ages 15–29 and were able to conduct all site visits and observations within one weekend. Powell et al. prepared for observations by reviewing church documentation, websites, online sermons, and interview transcripts to understand the types of activities available for observation. The researchers attended all possible weekend programming and significant church activities and gatherings outside of the weekend, as recommended by the church (Powell et al., 2017). I planned multiday visits for each FBO centered around major activities, to observe events and interview leaders. I interviewed the FBO leader before observing any events or interviewing other leaders. Observations have the advantage of being collected

within the immediate context of the case (Yin, 2018). However, depending on what a researcher observes, the events may be prohibitively time consuming without the resources of a research team to observe the available number of events (Yin, 2018).

Data Organization Technique

I created a case study database to organize the data compiled for this case study. Maintaining a case study database helps the novice researcher manage and organize the potentially large amounts of data collected during a case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yazan, 2015). The database is an orderly data compilation in both narrative and numeric form that helps the researcher ultimately create a report of interpretations and conclusions derived from the data (Yin, 2018). In creating such a database, a researcher can keep data organized according to major topics and categorized by data type, complete and available for efficient retrieval later (Baškarada, 2014; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). Thus, I used NVivo for the case study database, to manage and organize data as I collected and processed it. This case study database contained interview files (recordings and transcripts), research notes (observation field notes and reflexive journal entries), document evidence, and other relevant evidence that emerged during research. Upon return from on-site data collection at each FBO, I transcribed interviews and typed hand-written observation and journal entries to convert them into data that were organized and easily retrievable from the case study database. I scanned paper material, including hard-copy documents obtained from the FBOs. I temporarily stored FBO documents in a locked fire safe at my residence when I was unable to scan FBO materials upon receiving them. After scanning documents, I shredded all hard copies. As I developed my case

study database, I used the previously mentioned pseudonym convention to label files for the three FBOs and their participating leaders. I maintained case study database files separately from the file with the password-protected code list, which contained all participants' organizations, positions, and pseudonyms. I password protected and stored all electronic data files, which I will maintain securely for 5 years on an encrypted, stand-alone hard drive. After 5 years, I will permanently delete temporary and backup files from the stand-alone hard drive.

Data Analysis

I used methodological triangulation concerning data to reinforce accounts learned from interviews and findings across multiple data types. Case study researchers employ methodological triangulation by using multiple data collection methods (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), including interviews, observations, and document reviews (Ridder, 2017). A case study requires that a researcher use methodological triangulation to substantiate themes learned from interview data and contextualize their understanding of the phenomenon under study from multiple types of data (Baškarada, 2014). A researcher may begin preliminary data analysis simultaneously with data collection (Yazan, 2015). I achieved methodological triangulation by analyzing data from all collected material and corroborating information as I learned it through interviews, to determine key themes.

Before proceeding with data analysis, I ensured that all collected data were ready for processing; this process included transcribing interviews and typing notes from observations and information collected from online and offline document reviews. I retained all the collected data in NVivo as my case study database. To begin the analysis,

a researcher forms a general approach to analyzing data, which later matures into a specific data analysis technique (Yin, 2018). To proceed with data analysis, the researcher may use "any combination of procedures, such as… examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining (narrative and numeric) evidence" (Yin, 2018, p. 164). Researchers should use a cyclical approach to data analysis, with a continual focus on answering the research question (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018), ensuring defensible interpretations, stating findings, and drawing conclusions (Yin, 2018). I became familiar with the data through Yin's suggestion to "play" with the data by using a variety of visual displays, including an array sorted by themes and subthemes and a matrix with logical categories in which to place the evidence. I used Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to visualize the data I exported from NVivo.

Thematic Analysis

I used thematic analysis to guide my technique for analyzing the data. Thematic analysis is a simple process with a set of defined steps that allows researchers of all experience levels to assess data, ascertain themes, and conclude findings (Miller, 2018). Miller (2018) outlined the following steps for analyzing data using thematic analysis:

1. Delve into the data to become familiar with it through repeated reading, listening, or viewing before making assessments about patterns or themes. Take notes but make no conclusions.
2. Code or group similar themes through highlighting or other grouping means. Themes should represent key elements of data in support of or in contrast to the research theory.

3. Establish potential themes by grouping similarly coded data under broader themes.
4. Refine themes by reexamining data within each theme to determine whether they fit the pattern for the theme or require recoding to a different or new theme. Consider relationships between themes by using a thematic map to reflect on visual connections.
5. Assign meanings and define themes.
6. Write the formal report to document the themes, including examples from the data to signify the emergence and convergence of the themes.

Baxter and Jack (2008) recommended that a researcher analyze data sources across the aggregate rather than independently to achieve theme convergence. Also, to fully appreciate findings, the researcher must compare themes learned in the study with those found in the most current literature, looking for similarities and differences (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). I compared key themes with those that had been recently published in the literature before writing the conclusions.

Data Analysis Software Use

I used NVivo to support my data analysis process by loading themes into the software for analysis and using the visual mapping tool. Available computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, or CAQDAS, such as NVivo, may provide assistance and reliability with analysis, but the software does not conduct analysis (Yin, 2018). Thus, the software's usefulness in supporting my analysis was limited by the quality of the themes that I provided. Yin cautioned that researchers must provide rationale for the

codes they assign and analyze them for meaning before coming to conclusions. Although NVivo is useful for managing data and quickly retrieving it, Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, and de Eyto (2018) found that NVivo did not afford researchers the ability to view data on the macro level. However, Carcary (2011) found that NVivo helped her reclassify themes and understand 387 pages of transcribed interview data. Similarly, I found NVivo helpful at different steps in the data analysis process, given my need to collect and organize data from three organizations.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are essential goals of research because they reflect research quality (Cypress, 2017). The criteria for achieving high-quality research in qualitative inquiries include dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Cronin, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sarma, 2015). Rigor (Cypress, 2017; Morse, 2015) and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are also critical elements of high-quality research. Rigor is commonly associated with a positivist paradigm, while trustworthiness is commonly associated with a naturalistic paradigm (Noble & Smith, 2015; Sarma, 2015). Some researchers have noted criticism that qualitative inquiries lack rigor because qualitative researchers' methods and designs are of poor quality (Sarma, 2015) or lack justification (Noble & Smith, 2015). Cypress (2017) and Morse (2015) identified the need for rigor in qualitative inquiry because of its subjective nature. Yin (2018), as a positivist researcher, called for rigor in case studies, meaning that researchers must plan, execute, and document their research processes even when adapting to unforeseen situations, including redoing data collection when

necessary. Researchers should use high-quality research processes and present authentic study results (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). Thus, I ensured the quality of my research and demonstrated trustworthiness by implementing measures to address the four criteria associated with qualitative inquiry: dependability, confirmability, credibility, and transferability.

Dependability

Dependability represents the stability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the consistency of results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), and sufficiency of detailed process descriptions should another researcher repeat the study with the participants (Maher et al., 2018). A researcher can increase dependability in the study, for an external audit, through clearly documenting each step of the data collection procedures (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010; Sarma, 2015) and data analysis process for theme convergence (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). A researcher who collects and analyzes data independently of others may increase dependability by coding the data multiple times and comparing the results to see if the researcher obtains similar coding (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A researcher increases dependability by conducting member checks of the researcher's data interpretations with participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cypress, 2017). I achieved dependability in this study by following established interview protocols, clearly documenting data collection and analysis techniques, and conducting members checks. Strategies for ensuring dependability can also help with confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Sarma, 2015).

Confirmability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) differentiated confirmability from dependability. Confirmability concerns the researcher's neutrality throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and dependability concerns consistency in repeating the research processes and analyses (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Korstjens and Moser interpreted confirmability as assurance that the researcher derived the findings through neutral analysis of the data such that an auditor might conclude similar findings with the same data set. An audit trail is a strategy for enhancing confirmability, helping researchers track their processes for data collection and interpretation, as previously explained in the dependability subsection (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I kept detailed field notes to keep track of my data collection and interpretation processes.

Triangulation is another strategy to ensure confirmability (Sarma, 2015). When using methodological triangulation, a researcher applies multiple data collection methods (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), including observation and interviews. Multiple data sources potentially help the researcher corroborate findings, promoting truthfulness in the research beyond what the researcher could achieve with one data source (Sarma, 2015). A researcher uses data triangulation to collect the same data type for dissimilar times, people, or settings (Fusch et al., 2018). Fusch et al. (2018) encouraged researchers to collect rich, in-depth data for performing data triangulation. Using triangulation with multiple sources of evidence, including interviews, observations, and online and offline documentation, I might be able to corroborate findings collected from participants.

Credibility

Credibility represents the authenticity or degree of truthfulness represented in the findings (Cronin, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A researcher must represent the realities of participants, to remove researcher bias and ensure credibility (Noble & Smith, 2015). As the researcher may be the sole data collector, the researcher may increase credibility and ensure the accuracy of the data collected by conducting member checks of the researcher's data interpretations with participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cypress, 2017). Triangulation is also a strategy for achieving credibility in a study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Triangulating data sources and types lends credibility to a study because it cues readers that the researcher explored the phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Collecting multiple types of data from multiple sources lends itself to collecting thick data. Researchers should collect and report rich and thick descriptions of participants' accounts to lend credibility to the findings (Fusch et al., 2018; Noble & Smith, 2015). To achieve credibility, I triangulated multiple data sources and types and conducted member checks with all participants.

Transferability

According to Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007), qualitative researchers should abandon attempts to generalize their results, because qualitative research is time- and context-bound. Researchers provide only the concluding context, not generalizations potentially applicable to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher is responsible only for providing detailed and thick descriptions of context; it is for future

researchers to determine transferability to other contexts (Cypress, 2017; Fusch et al., 2018; Schwandt et al., 2007). Therefore, I did not determine transferability but instead provided detailed and thick descriptions and left it to readers to determine potential transferability to other contexts.

Data Saturation

El Hussein, Jakubec, and Osuji (2015) identified data saturation as the point at which the researcher neither hears nor sees new information during data collection. Data saturation depends on purposive sampling that establishes clear participant criteria for gaining information richness (G. Guest et al., 2006; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). To reach saturation, G. Guest et al. (2006) recommended conducting interviews of a semistructured nature; otherwise, with every newly asked question in unstructured interviews, saturation would become a moving target. For data analysis, G. Guest et al. recommended determining a strategy for combining or splitting themes depending on the complexity of the data. Cypress (2017) recommended that researchers analyze data starting with the first data collection. By using multiple data sources, researchers improve data saturation and the reliability of the findings (Fusch et al., 2018). I ensured data saturation by establishing participant criteria, conducting semistructured interviews with a minimum number of participants, collecting various types of data from multiple sources, and analyzing data after each collection event.

Transition and Summary

In Section 1, I provided foundational information on the study, including a description of the business problem, an overview of the conceptual framework, and a

review of the literature encompassing these elements. In Section 2, I addressed participant criteria; described the rationale for selecting the research method and design; and explained processes for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. In Section 2, I provided strategies to enhance the study's reliability and validity through four criteria associated with a qualitative inquiry: dependability, confirmability, credibility, and transferability. In Section 3, I provide a presentation of findings, a description of major themes, and the application of findings to the conceptual framework and business practice. In Section 3, I also address potential social change implications, recommended actions for practitioners, and reflections on this study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that three Protestant FBOs and their leaders used to engage millennials. Compared to previous generations at the same age, millennials have attended church less (Twenge et al., 2016), choosing instead to express their faith outside of religious institutions (Salas-Wright et al., 2015). Many young adults, having left their church, eventually return when marrying or having children (Denton & Uecker, 2018; Schleifer & Chaves, 2017); however, some millennials have delayed these adulthood milestones until later in life (McLeigh & Boberiene, 2014). Some churches do not support young adults through major life decisions such as finding a home, marrying, parenting, and establishing a career (Powell et al., 2017). Because of these factors, FBO leaders have cause for concern as to whether millennials will return to churches as previous generations did when achieving adulthood milestones. In this study, I discovered strategies FBO leaders used to engage millennials despite the generation's irregular participation habits and delayed adulthood milestones.

Each FBO in this study reflected a different Protestant affiliation and was located in a different city type (see Table 3). The leaders of the different FBOs implemented some similar strategies for engaging millennials, and some strategies were distinct to one or two FBOs. Two FBOs created various-sized groups, with and without mentors of older generations, dedicated to developing millennials in their *age and stage* of life and faith. One pastor of young adults, for example, focused on addressing roadblocks to

faith. A different FBO fostered connection with young millennials by virtue of its proximity to several college campuses. Its leaders invested time in the students, helping them develop their faith and life skills. Together, the FBO leaders in the study demonstrated a requisite understanding of millennials, a *metapattern,* a process and pattern of patterns that connected all themes (see Bateson [1979] for an in-depth description of the term metapattern). Table 2 shows the metapattern and themes that emerged from the study. A summary of the metapattern and themes is included in the section on Presentation of Findings.

Table 2

Summary of the Metapattern and Themes

Metapattern	Major themes
Understand millennials.	Create a sense of belonging and family in welcoming, supportive environments.
	Remain open to innovating practices that keep the church Christ-centered.
	Build relationships that extend beyond church.
	Empower and equip people in their faith, in their life, and as leaders.

I used the following pseudonym convention for the three FBOs and their participating leaders, abbreviating the pseudonym and adding a number (1, 2, or 3) for each participant from that church:

- Organization 1 was Mercy Rapids (MR) Church, and its participants were MR1 and MR2.
- Organization 2 was New Bridge (NB) Church, and its participants were NB1 and NB2.
- Organization 3 was Growing Roots (GR) Church, and its participants were

GR1, GR2, and GR3.

Table 3 contains a comparative overview of the three FBO cases. An overview of each case follows in the section on Presentation of Findings.

Table 3

Summary of Faith-Based Organization Case Attributes

Attribute	Mercy Rapids Church	New Bridge Church	Growing Roots Church
Location	Western U.S. *responsive suburbia*	Western U.S. *downtown dynamic*	Western U.S. *student and military community*
Affiliation	Denominational	Interdenominational	Nondenominational
Average attendance	1,600 across two worship services	1,150 across three worship services	150 in one worship service
Building	Purpose-built, large church building with multiple, various-sized gathering rooms spread around and across two floors, away from sanctuary	Repurposed downtown industrial building, with an exterior of preserved historical architecture and a modernized interior with restored brick, steel, and exposed beams	Two moderate-sized, purpose-built church buildings—one to accommodate the sanctuary only and the other for children's activities; otherwise, ministry is carried out in multiple community homes and, for music studios, brightly painted shipping containers
Founding	Early 1970s	Early 2010s	Early 2000s
Unique characteristics	Multigenerational congregation balanced across age ranges; European heritage; significant focus on local-to-global mission outreach programs	Multicultural congregation dominated by adults of early 20s to late 40s; grassroots campaign to reach the unchurched across extensive urban enclaves	Ministry focused on local college students in off-campus locations; handful of congregants outside of millennial age range; worship music ministry with worldwide reach

Note. Terminology descriptions in italics are from U.S. Census Bureau's (2019) geographic predictive models for the 2020 U.S. Census.

An analysis of the case study data found that all FBOs exhibited each of the themes. I used a weighted average of the interview codes from each FBO because Mercy Rapids and New Bridge had two participants each and Growing Roots had three. Table 4 provides the distribution of percentages of each theme per FBO.

Table 4

Percentage Distribution of Major Themes per Faith-Based Organization Case

Case	Create a sense of belonging (%)	Open to innovating (%)	Build relationships (%)	Empower and equip people (%)
MR	35.2	46.2	24.7	27.3
NB	35.4	22.0	24.2	24.1
GR	29.4	31.8	51.0	48.6
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Note. The shading represents a gradient from highest (darkest) to lowest (lightest) of the percentage distribution across each theme. Theme names are truncated. The data include interviews, observations, and online and offline documentation.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question was as follows: What strategies do FBO leaders use to engage millennials? The three FBOs for this study met the two criteria for participation: (1) identifying as a church, and (2) having grown for the last 5 years because of engaging millennials or, if not growing, having something missional, or outwardly oriented, that appeals to millennials. In this study, all FBO leaders believed the FBO has grown because the leaders have engaged a large number of millennials in relation to the size of the congregation. The three FBOs are established in Western U.S. suburban, urban, and college cities and are affiliated with denominational, interdenominational, and nondenominational Protestant churches, respectively. In interviews, the FBO leaders described the different strategies they use to increase millennial engagement in their respective FBOs. The strategies showed some commonality as well as variation across the three FBOs. After conducting thematic analysis, I found four themes and one metapattern connecting all themes. Table 5 lists the metapattern, four themes, and their assigned meaning.

Table 5

Metapattern, Themes, and Their Assigned Meanings

Metapattern	Theme	Assigned meaning
Understand millennials.		Leaders learned about millennials by spending time with them and listening to them to understand how to welcome them into church environments, adapt learning groups to answer their questions, equip them better in faith, build relationships with them, and empower them with leadership opportunities that fit their interests.
	Create a sense of belonging and family in welcoming, supportive environments.	Leaders engaged millennials through a narrowing funnel of group sizes according to millennials' age and stage; leaders structured group sizes and topics to adapt to millennials' learning styles to help them feel welcome and foster a sense of physical, emotional, and spiritual belonging.
	Remain open to innovating practices that keep the church Christ-centered.	Leaders innovated new practices as their understanding of millennials changed; leaders balanced the organic versus programmatic nature of their activities, connected virtually and in person with millennials, and created intergenerational connections.
	Build relationships that extend beyond church.	Leaders built relationships with millennials by interacting routinely with them, establishing trust, listening to their stories, and sharing their own; leaders cared about the issues that mattered to millennials, whether related to faith or not. Leaders facilitated millennials' initiating supportive fellowship with others inside and outside the church.
	Empower and equip people in their faith, in their life, and as leaders.	Leaders developed millennials by equipping them in faith and life skills so that millennials learned to lead inside and outside the church; leaders taught millennials how to apply faith in everyday life, not just on Sundays.

Overviews of the cases follow. More details about the cases are available in Appendix D.

Overview of the Three Cases and Their Participants

Mercy Rapids Church overview. Mercy Rapids is a denominational church in the heart of a sprawling suburban city booming with growth. Its leaders spoke of the urge to increase the number of believers where the growth is biggest: in the millennial population. Mercy Rapids implemented a multifaceted approach to ministering to its multigenerational congregation. The church's digital identity represents "who we want to

be but may not entirely represent," according to MR1. Thus, Mercy Rapids presents a physical identity that is incongruent with its digital persona. MR1 recognized this, acknowledging that, regarding their physical structures, "we don't have the budget to change, but if we could start from scratch, we would." The approximately 30-member leadership team of Mercy Rapids offers comprehensive training programs for volunteer leaders in oversight and compassionate community outreach. Mercy Rapids leaders recognized the need to prioritize millennial engagement, as dominated by young millennial families, by making informed decisions about programming without abandoning how they engage older generations. What Mercy Rapids lacks in multicultural diversity it makes up for in generational diversity.

Mercy Rapids offers newcomers opportunities to connect with others in groups of large (more than 75), medium (15–75 people), and small (fewer than 15) sizes—an *engagement funnel*. The funnel evokes the image of giving people ever narrower openings for engagement to match their comfort levels. That is, they attract newcomers to the church in large-group activities until they are ready for medium groups, then the more intimate small groups. Mercy Rapids structures its offerings to equip its congregants spiritually, from informal introductory classes to small, close-knit groups of people who grow in faith together. The church has beginner classes for those who want to explore Christianity in a casual setting without prayer or singing. It also has widely attended gatherings in which people learn and grow in faith together, half according to their age and stage of life and the other half integrated intergenerationally. These groups help "make a big church small," according to MR1. Examples of groups were

intergenerational groups; youth groups by grade and gender; and groups of college and postgraduate students, young marrieds, young families, people of ages 40 to 60, and those over 60.

Data collection from Mercy Rapids occurred over 7 nonconsecutive days and comprised

- interviews and member checking with two FBO leaders (the director of young adults and the community outreach director);
- observations of five activities (two worship services, two large group gatherings, and one medium group gathering);
- documentation reviews of online material, including the main website and subordinate pages, videos, social media (Facebook and Instagram), and other electronically available material; and
- documentation reviews of offline material, including worship bulletins, informational handouts, and meeting notes.

New Bridge Church overview. In almost a dozen years, New Bridge has grown from a grassroots start-up church held in the lead pastor's basement to a vibrant church of about 1,150 occupying the heart of an urban downtown. New Bridge sits among the bustle of sports arenas, skyscrapers, crossing freeways, historic buildings, restored homes, medical centers, and the homeless. New Bridge's goal is to unite the masses across the spectrum in the city through their love for Jesus. Given its immersion in a melting pot, New Bridge embodies a hip vibe with its building structure, lighting, booming music, and leadership of people mostly in their 20s to 40s and a mix of genders.

Their website conveys an urban-modern design, and their physical building reflects their digital image. The people I observed congregating at the church and its events reflected the leadership in their warmth, smiles, and openness to all who entered. They were mostly middle-aged to younger people, with approximately one-third a multicultural mix. The congregation appeared to be made up of young singles and their friends, young families, a few multigenerational families, and older singles and couples. Compared to Mercy Rapids and Growing Roots, New Bridge appeared to have the most millennials of all birth years in attendance.

The church's formal 11-member leadership team relies on a robust foundation of volunteers to lead and host a variety of events, including its regularly scheduled 60 small-group ministries. New Bridge leaders spoke of using the funnel structure for engaging young adults. Beyond the small-group ministries, New Bridge's dominant focus is its ministry of young adults, which has a target age of single people especially in their 20s. That ministry represents a minichurch; it has group activities at small, medium, and large levels with and without faith elements. Because of the size of the ministry of young adults, NB1 focuses a lot of effort into integrating its activities into the broader church. New Bridge's leaders established small group ministries (ideally of fewer than 10 people) to help people evolve in their faith, with some of the groups meeting according to time of day (men's breakfast, women's coffee) or city suburb (e.g., the Westside Young Adults). They structured groups according to

- age (e.g., young adults, empty nesters, intergenerational),
- gender,

- family role (e.g., engaged, expecting, moms, dads, moms and daughters),
- faith focus (e.g., prayer, doubting habits, Bible characters),
- bilinguality, and
- desired life focus (e.g., entrepreneur, financial growth).

Data collection from New Bridge occurred over 4 nonconsecutive days and comprised

- interviews and member checking with two FBO leaders (the pastor of young adults and the activities leader);
- observations of four activities (two worship services, one large-sized group gathering, and one informational meeting);
- documentation reviews of online material, including two different suborganization websites and subordinate pages, social media (Facebook and Instagram), and other electronically available material; and
- documentation reviews of offline material, including informational handouts.

Growing Roots Church overview. Growing Roots leaders feel called to focus their ministry on college students, given the church's proximity to several colleges, including a large state college. The church's location, surrounded as it is by humanmade boundaries (freeways on one side and campus buildings on the other) creates a captive audience on which Growing Roots focuses its ministry. Growing Roots operates primarily out of a half-dozen dispersed community homes within a few blocks' walking distance of each other; however, the church services take place on the opposite side of the freeway, a reasonable biking distance away. The congregation of Growing Roots

comprises primarily younger, college-age millennials and a few older folks. The large leadership team of about 20 people is composed mostly of millennials, with a few Generation Xers and a 60-year-old baby boomer couple. The lead pastor, GR1, along with a lead associate, GR2, supports and encourages the leadership team in directing its targeted ministries freely.

Growing Roots is more than a church; it oversees a worldwide worship music outreach program, internship programs, rotations through volunteer community houses, and a college student ministry. The church recently purchased more land in hopes of constructing a new community-housing ministry and outreach effort. This effort would continue their *life-on-life* approach to living in community and equipping each other for a highly relational faith. The leaders worked with willing congregation and community members to rent out or open up rooms in community homes for their student outreach and internship programs. Growing Roots repurposed various transoceanic shipping containers into brightly colored mini–recording studios positioned on the residential lot, to record worship music for their production label. The worship music ministry appeared to have a significant influence in helping millennials form and strengthen connections with each other and God through music.

Data collection from Growing Roots occurred over 4 consecutive and 3 additional nonconsecutive days and comprised

- interviews and member checking with three FBO leaders (two senior leaders and the worship music leader);

- observations of four activities (one worship service, one large-sized group gathering, one worship activity with music, and one leadership meeting);
- documentation reviews of online material, including three different suborganization websites and subordinate pages, three different suborganization social media sites (Facebook and Instagram), and other electronically available material; and
- documentation reviews of offline material, including published books by senior leaders.

Summary of leaders' strategies. Table 6 summarizes the most prevalent strategies each FBO used to engage millennials.

Table 6

Summary of Leaders' Strategies to Engage Millennials

Mercy Rapids	New Bridge	Growing Roots
• Place millennials in leadership positions throughout the organization. • Connect millennials in various-sized groups (large, medium, and small—an engagement funnel) according to their age and life stage. • Be authentic when communicating with millennials. • Adapt learning environments and community outreach to topics and activities that interest millennials. • Create intergenerational groups in which millennials can connect with mentors. • Prioritize safety and security of millennials' children. • Look at other churches' strategies and adapt what makes sense.	• Build relationships with millennials by seeking to understand the circumstances that formed their faith. • Connect millennials with people like them, through various-sized groups (the engagement funnel) and activities with and without faith elements. • Provide welcoming, nonjudgmental environments in which people can connect. • Empower millennials by placing them in leadership positions. • Equip millennials with tools to find authenticity in their faith; that effort might mean having to unlearn what does not work. • Keep a critical eye on how to engage millennials better.	• Care about millennials and listen to their needs. • Build relationships through one-on-one, small group, and life-on-life ministering. • Empower millennials and challenge them with leadership opportunities. • Equip millennials for learning the faith and applying it to everyday life. • Create a sense of family and welcome through living in community. • Exhibit authentic leadership by living out the Gospel in daily life. • Enhance worship ministry outreach by mastering digital platforms and methods of releasing recorded music to the public. • Focus on ministering to college students in various-sized groups.

Thematic Analysis of Data

During thematic analysis, I developed codes or phrases representing central ideas from initial interviews with the FBO leaders. After concluding initial coding, I refined and grouped the codes and subcodes, then repeated the process after conducting member checking. For alignment with these codes, I reviewed all

- observation materials,
- field notes,

- hard-copy documentation (brochures, handouts, information sheets, meeting notes, worship bulletins, and program notices), and
- online media (photos, videos, websites, and social media).

Following Miller's (2018) guide for thematic analysis, I continued to review all codes across the data to refine further and group the codes until broader themes emerged. I reexamined all the data elements and codes to determine any relationships between themes. I identified four themes and a pattern connecting the themes. Although I developed the themes primarily from interviews, I validated all themes and insights using observations and electronic and hard-copy documentation. For example, leaders spoke in interviews about building relationships, and I found support for that theme through documentation (a calendar listing events where people could get to know others in a variety of environments) and observations (people signing up for the next event where they could meet more people). A table of themes and coding by data sources is in Appendix E. Table 7 shows the prevalence of themes per FBO.

Table 7

Prevalence of Themes per Faith-Based Organization

Themes	Number of code references			Total
	MR	NB	GR	
Create a sense of belonging and family in welcoming, supportive environments.	152	152	126	430
Remain open to innovating practices that keep the church Christ-centered.	133	63	91	287
Build relationships that extend beyond church.	49	48	100	196
Empower and equip people in their faith, in their life, and as leaders.	95	84	168	346

Note. The shading represents a gradient from highest (darkest) to lowest (lightest) of the concentration of themes across data types. I averaged interview code counts from each FBO.

Within this study, a metapattern that connects all themes as a continual and iterative process is leaders needing to understand millennials. Leaders' listening to and spending time with millennials to learn to relate to them and their needs was integral to all themes. Bateson (1979) called for readers to consider a pattern of patterns—a *metapattern;* its interconnectedness to processes; and its context, which connects those patterns through time and gives meaning to the pattern. Figure 6 shows the linkage between the metapattern and the themes.

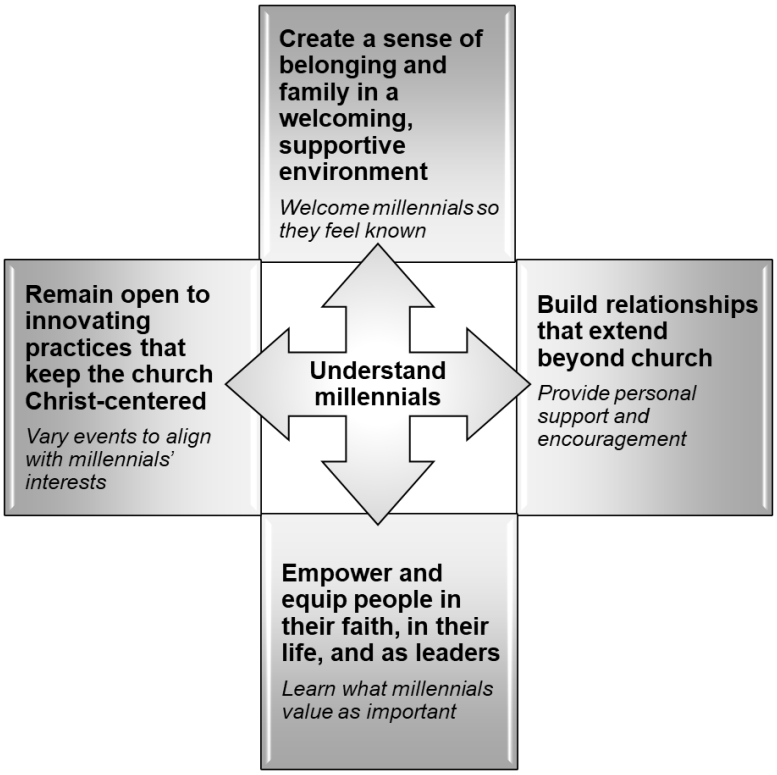

Figure 6. Metapattern and linkage to themes.

Next, I present the metapattern and themes. This order of presentation surfaced because of leaders' continual emphasis on needing to know and understand millennials before effectively engaging them. I provide

- detailed descriptions of the metapattern and themes;
- summaries of data elements from interviews, observations, and documentation that represent the themes; and
- additional tables containing themes, subthemes, and sample codes in Appendix E.

Metapattern: Understand millennials. The FBO leaders repeatedly discussed the knowledge they had gained of millennials through a variety of strategies that included spending time with them, listening to them, and valuing their contributions. All leaders noted the need to understand who millennials represented as a generation. The leaders recognized some of these qualities as millennials'

- desires to be heard and valued,
- not showing up for church out of obligation,
- lack of commitment,
- lack of financial and relationship stability, and
- proclivity toward antiestablishment.

The leaders emphasized that through understanding millennials they could equip them better in faith and empower them with leadership opportunities that fit their interests or calling. Also, the leaders recognized that millennials needed to feel comfortable in the church to feel welcome and to sense they belonged. Hence, they realized the importance of creating opportunities for millennials to be with groups of like-minded, supportive people who will answer questions without judgment. The leaders described millennials as needing to establish relationships with others before they would

have a sense of belonging and buy-in to the mission. Table 8 includes a sample of quotes from leaders showing the logic of their seeking to understand millennials before equipping them spiritually or facilitating their sense of belonging. Additional information about leaders' understanding millennials is in Appendix E.

Table 8

Sample Quotes Reflecting Leaders' Strategies to Understand Millennials Before Creating Experiences for Them

Mercy Rapids	New Bridge	Growing Roots
"Millennials care about who they know. Relationships and having a connection with other people matters to engaging millennials. . . . They need to feel like they are actually bringing something valuable to the table. Then, you need to provide them feedback, so they know you are listening to them. You can ask them their thoughts on different strategies." – MR1	"Listening is always the best tool. Asking people questions and listening to where they are. That is a massive strategy and tool. We tend to answer questions that no one is asking." – NB1	"This sounds so typical of millennials, but you have to let them know that they're important; let them know they're valued, but you have to mean it. . . . You need to acknowledge and validate that their words, dreams, and desires matter, even if they're a bit off, and we need to listen to them." – GR1
"We spent a lot of time with millennials to understand their needs, what they care about, and who they are as a generation. . . . We think about what is important to millennials. We address the social issues that are important to millennials and think about ways to highlight them through different ministry partnering opportunities, small groups, and topics of discussion through social media." – MR2	"When I first came here, I didn't know anyone. People would immediately come over, talk to me, and engage with me. I thought that was huge. It felt like a family atmosphere and very welcoming." – NB2	"One of my strategies is to know who millennials are, be with them, be in their lives, and meet them where they're at physically. That's why we live here in [this city]. We want to be here and available. . . . Millennials have physical access to us." – GR2

The leaders' strategies for understanding millennials differed according to the FBO's size, the characteristics of the city, and the characteristics of its residents. Mercy Rapids, as the largest FBO in the study, had leaders and congregants who sought to learn new people's names so those newcomers would feel known and not lost in such a large church. The leaders would get to know them through new-member classes and personality tests, then align them with volunteer positions that matched their interests.

New Bridge members reached out to new people by name as well, then welcomed them into faith by listening to them and addressing any roadblocks to a clearer understanding of faith. Growing Roots showed millennials they valued them by equipping them in faith and spending time in personal, one-on-one development. GR2 referred to this practice as *pouring into* them. Growing Roots is in a college town in which most residents are younger millennials. Its leaders are involved continuously in equipping the young millennials in life and faith skills. They teach them to think critically about their faith and ask questions, to engage them beyond listening and learning.

The metapattern of leaders' understanding millennials extends knowledge on the meaningful and productive experiences inherent in the VCC model, the conceptual framework for this study. In the VCC model, people derive value according to their meaningful and productive experiences on engagement platforms (Ramaswamy, 2011). Continual and iterative interactions are critical to cocreating value materially and symbolically (Ramaswamy, 2011). Järvi et al. (2018) found that leaders' inability to serve a stakeholder's primary needs resulted in value codestruction, a concept evident in the context of FBOs. The leaders in this study recognized that without understanding millennials and their expectations, millennials' needs would not be met and they would lose connection with them. The leaders reached out to millennials, spent the time to understand their expectations, and then adapted to their needs. Plé (2017) identified a potential for value codestruction when at least one participating entity only guesses what is desired by the others instead of engaging in conversation and soliciting feedback during the integration process. The willingness of the FBO leaders to adapt the manner

in which they deliver their message resulted from feedback processes with millennials. Pera et al. (2016) found that the discovery of shared motives between participating entities (gleaned from feedback) is critical to cocreating value from interchanges. While remaining Christ-centered, FBO leaders in this study adapted learning environments to focus on younger generations.

Theme: Create a sense of belonging and family in welcoming, supportive environments. The FBO leaders implemented the strategies of creating an engagement funnel and shaping welcoming environments to foster millennials' sense of belonging through *engagement platforms*. Ramaswamy and Gouillart (2010) referred to engagement platforms as virtual or digital places (social media) in which organizations develop cocreative experiences with stakeholders. Leaders design and innovate these platforms iteratively and continuously to facilitate interactions and experiences of mutual value to organizations and their participants (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010). I found that, as a result of the FBOs' engagement platforms, people connected with others, strengthened their faith, and experienced a sense of belonging. Leaders' creating these kinds of environments allowed for cocreation of experiences so congregants could build deep and lasting relationships, encouraging each other as they enhanced their faith knowledge. These elements strengthened people's sense of belonging. A table containing this theme, additional subthemes, and sample codes is in Appendix E.

The engagement funnel. Leaders from all three FBOs reported engaging millennials in groups of various sizes: large, medium, and small. Mercy Rapids leaders spoke of this strategy as the engagement funnel, and New Bridge leaders referred to this

strategy as a funnel. (Additional discussion about activities at each level of the engagement funnel is in Appendix E.) The leaders focused on engaging millennials through group activities inside and outside of the church environment to ensure that they felt a growing sense of belonging.

Large groups. The largest group activities were typically worship services, some by invitation, with expected broad attendance (e.g., church picnics, Easter service, or activities involving food or music). Although new members might initially attend an FBO through a large group activity, such large-scale events held a disadvantage, according to the FBO leaders. For example, NB1 asserted that "The events that work best are those that allow people to foster their spiritual relationships with others. . . . Massive services with thousands of people [sitting] in the dark watching someone saying something . . . that's not the best way to spiritually engage someone." Although large events allowed people to enter the funnel of church activities, people needed to move beyond them to smaller groups to experience ongoing engagement, a deeper level of spiritual commitment with others, and a sense of belonging.

Medium groups. Millennials engaged in medium-sized group activities or events that aligned with their age and stage. In these groups, people established connections and built relationships with others in the FBO as they explored their faith journey. A group of this size meeting at least twice monthly can help millennials feel more connected to others, even in larger churches, thus enhancing their sense of belonging. Engagement in these groups would often continue until what leaders at all FBOs spoke of as millennials' *aging out* into a group for the next age and stage. An example would be young adult

singles maturing into groups of newly married people. If a group did not exist that millennials needed, the millennials spoke to leaders of the need, or they created one.

Small groups. In small groups of fewer than 15, people explored deeper relationships in which they could be vulnerable and share personal stories of struggles in life and faith. They met inside and outside of faith contexts while continuing to grow in their faith and personal lives together. GR1 reflected that "If Jesus maxed out at 12, we'd be silly to think we could do it better. Smaller groups are better with millennials. [Small] groups are where millennials could work out and work through things." Similarly, MR1 felt encouraged about the success of small group ministries: "Our method may be slow, but Jesus started small with 3, then 12 about 2000 years ago, and that was his model of ministry—it was slow." Often, small groups met within secular contexts to reinforce friendships outside of the church.

In line with the VCC model, mutually beneficial value resulted from interactions within these small groups as millennials engaged more deeply in this final stage of the engagement funnel. Millennials and leaders derived value according to meaningful and productive interchanges within their groups, resulting in their belonging, their empowerment, and FBOs' continued viability. The FBO leaders' demonstrated success with engagement funnels enhances previous research on the VCC model in religious organizations. In their study of a Canadian Christian church, Grandy and Levit (2015) reported how the church cocreated value with stakeholders: Members' involvement in the leadership and design of a variety of activities cultivated a sense of belonging, a culture of community, and shared leadership—all of which represent key tenets of VCC. Grandy

and Levit found that, in creating their church experiences, leaders established multiple opportunities for members to interact with each other. Figure 7 depicts the VCC model with engagement platforms applied to the engagement funnel within this study, wherein leaders created opportunities for mutually beneficial exchanges to engage millennials.

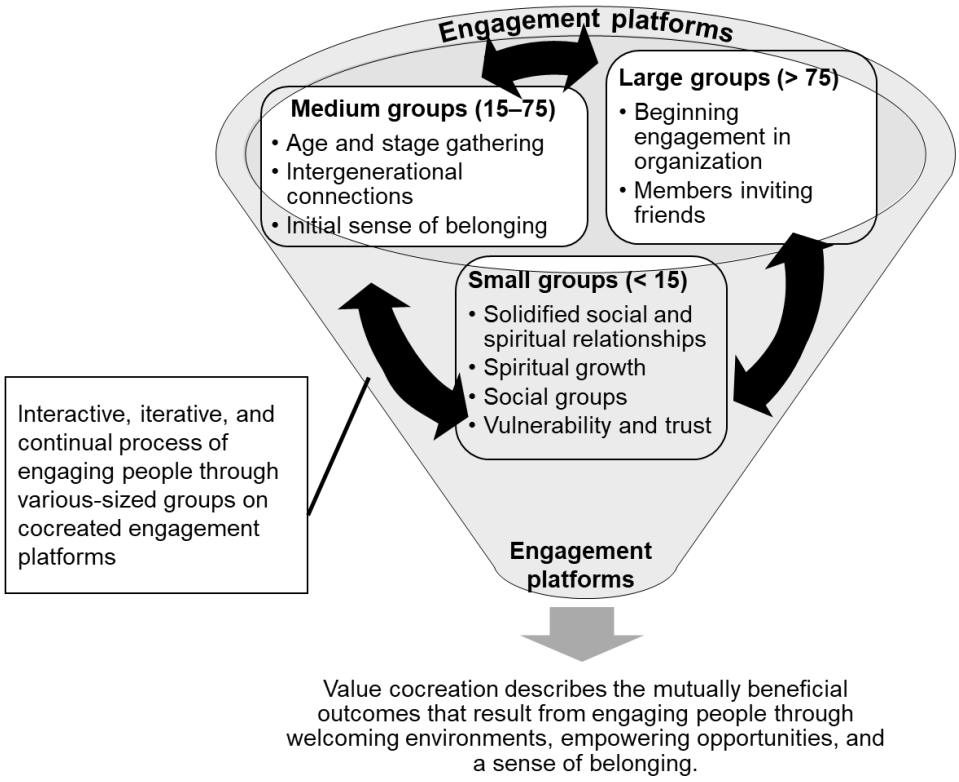

Figure 7. Engagement funnels in faith-based organizations' large, medium, and small groups.

The leaders in this study interacted with millennials in group engagement platforms of various sizes to understand them, build relationships, and equip them. Mercy Rapids adapted group sizes to facilitate group dynamics that would foster relationship growth. Table 9 shows sample quotes of leaders' iterative and interactive experiences of cocreation with millennials that had mutually beneficial outcomes.

Table 9

Sample Quotes of Leaders' Cocreation Experiences with Millennials

Mercy Rapids	New Bridge	Growing Roots
"We involve millennials in leadership opportunities and within our organizational activities. For a big annual mission outreach, I intentionally recruit millennials to be a part of a small team that starts planning efforts 8 months out. The team has the freedom to plan the outreach and controls what we do and how we execute it. They're invested in what the outreach looks like. We give the team the responsibility to set the tone and direction for the event, and their engagement level increases from there because they own that event. It's theirs." – MR2	"[Young adults keep returning here because we are about] giving away more ownership of leading activities and not leaving activities to just three people, for example. That allows them those opportunities to take part in owning their experience. Making people owners and involved, whether in young adult ministry or the church, makes them more invested. Inviting more leaders to serve, inviting them to be a part of the thing you are asking them to be a part of is really helpful for keeping people engaged." – NB1	"My strength is that I approach our leaders with this blank canvas and let them do the painting. I'm not necessarily millennial driven, but my leadership style ties into how I see millennials, God, and life. I want to empower millennials to take leadership and ownership of whatever it is they want to do and then not micromanage them. I need to be able to trust them, and that trust has to grow between me and those millennials for me to give them leadership with ownership opportunities." – GR1
"Millennials want to be heard. They need to know there's a seat at the table for them, and they need to feel like they are actually bringing something valuable to the table. . . . You can ask them their thoughts on different strategies. When you enable them, whether through leadership positions [or] being on equal footing as others, then there is a higher chance of gaining millennials' buy-in. Having millennials taking part in crucial organizational decision-making is associated with . . . [an] authentic approach of . . . them being a part of the leadership team's decisions." – MR1		"[GR1], as a senior leader, has to do a lot with teaching people about owning their commitment. [GR1] helps them understand how to have self-discipline. Being taught is part of this huge need to fulfill millennials' desire to have these figures to guide them in life. Sometimes they squirm at it, but they eventually own that they need it and step into it. . . . We challenge them, but then the challenge grows them. Something deeper within them wants it, likes it, and thrives under it." – GR2

Welcoming environments fostering a sense of belonging. To create welcoming groups, FBO leaders adopted an interactive learning style and adapted group topics to millennials' cultural and social interests, while remaining biblical and Christ-centered in message. NB1 relayed the story of an old preacher who spoke of having "a newspaper in one hand and a Bible in the other. . . . One is about preaching . . . what the word of God . . . is doing in our hearts. . . . [The other is a] firm grip on culture and what's happening in

the world." NB1 discussed New Bridge's approach for creating an environment open to faith questioning: "You create an environment, not a specific program, but what we do within our programs that address[es] elephants in the room. . . . That whole way of doing things increases engagement. Let's talk about it because everyone else is talking about it." When discussion of millennials' curiosities and doubts grows to the point of vigorous questioning, the millennials feel connected to the organization because the leaders rise to meet their needs (Puffer, 2018).

Creating a supportive environment open to questions about faith, yet relevant to today, aligns with Powell et al.'s (2017) finding that thriving churches help young adults understand complex cultural issues in their contexts. The FBO leaders' openness to critical self-reflection and flexibility for welcoming doubters or those new to faith was exhibited in NB1's statement: "What's worked is when we've created content that allows people to ask questions about their faith instead of the church being critical about people's questions." The leaders' welcoming environments for faith learning was apparent in small groups of interactive learning environments that were open to the different perspectives people have on faith: doubting (dechurched), questioning (unchurched), and maturing (rechurched). MR2 spoke about their interactive style: "We'll [have] a teacher closer in age to them. [It's] interactive [because] millennials want to participate in the learning process . . . in the form of small groups, table discussion. . . . Their learning format is different because they relate to others differently." An interactive approach helped millennials feel a part of the learning process and bolstered their sense of belonging. Additional discussion about leaders'

fostering welcoming environments by offering unstructured hangout time and shaping physical aspects of experiences is in Appendix E.

Theme summary: Create a sense of belonging and family in welcoming, supportive environments. Leaders' shaping of environments and activities resulted in people's experiencing physical, emotional, and spiritual belonging. Leaders were able to shape environments because they listened to millennials. In response to feeling heard, millennials open up to offering their ideas or expressing their doubts (Drovdahl & Keuss, 2020). Findings regarding reciprocal exchanges extend research on the VCC model in social service organizations, such as that of Hamid and Khan (2020). Hamid and Khan found that meaningful exchanges resulted from collective participation between beneficiaries, donors, and managers of a social service organization that provided microfinance services (extending social, emotional, and resources and access to experts through strategic relationships). Findings regarding this theme extend research on the VCC model in FBOs, such as that of Grandy and Levit (2015). Novel findings include the FBOs' successful use of the engagement funnel, wherein leaders created opportunities to engage millennials in mutually beneficial exchanges, in the VCC model.

Findings regarding this theme are consistent with Powell et al.'s (2017) finding that young adults thrive on an authentic feel and a warm welcome, resulting in their having a sense of family and belonging. These findings are also similar to Gailliard and Davis's (2017) findings that building relationships solidifies members' belonging to a congregation. In that study, Christian church members in a multitude of congregations discovered new relationships and felt valued, thus integrating into their congregations and

their broader communities with friendships that continued outside of church walls (Gailliard & Davis, 2017). Increased engagement of young adults was common among positive, welcoming church communities (Gailliard & Davis, 2017; Powell et al., 2017). In practice, FBO leaders cocreate opportunities with millennials (or any interested members) to shape the environments in which people engage. Together, they do this through being flexible in the execution of events, sharing ownership of activities, and remaining active in carrying out events.

Theme: Remain open to innovating practices that keep the church Christ-centered. This theme comprises FBO leaders' continual self-reflection regarding their innovation of practices. The leaders primarily considered ways to balance the flow of activities, connect with millennials virtually and in person, and create intergenerational connections. The leaders also reflected on the organic versus programmatic nature of their activities; examples are FBO events that occurred routinely versus one time only, scheduled versus ad hoc, and in person versus virtual.

As leaders considered whether strategies required changing, they looked at quantifiable indicators of success (increased attendance, financial giving, leadership development, and program participation). Some leaders said that they generally looked at how much time people spent at the FBO and whether that time had increased, but most leaders did not measure those indicators. NB1 stated that they think their ministries do well perhaps "because the room is full? Or how do we even know who is in the room? We need to measure it. . . . If we don't have their date of birth, then we don't really know. . . . We're trying to do better." For example, the leaders could note a need for

more chairs than usual for millennial-specific activities; that increase would represent a higher attendance. As suggested by MR2, if more millennials are attending church and other activities, then "perhaps they're inviting [others, and] if they're [doing that], then you know you're achieving results." Some leaders found that measurable indicators counted for less than indicators that were more difficult to measure directly.

Such less measurable indicators included whether relationships had grown or people were more spiritually equipped. Some leaders believed that establishing meaningful relationships with others in the FBOs increases millennials' attachment and sense of belonging to the FBO fellowship. Because these indicators were more difficult to assess directly, the leaders often turned to assessing them indirectly. MR2 proposed that millennials' increased attendance could be shown by the fact that "they're inviting their friends . . . because they feel like they belong . . . [and] want to be here. . . . Millennials won't go where they don't want to be." Some leaders described increasing the number of small groups and hangout opportunities to foster relationship development. NB1 discussed assessing the need for extra small groups as a way to measure their success: "People are hanging out when we don't ask them to. I think that's the first step in spiritual formation and getting dialed into a community and following Jesus: Do it with other people." Consequently, leaders assessed whether millennials had become more spiritually equipped by noting the increased number of small groups required to mature millennials in their faith. Leaders learned from millennials' input what kind of activities to add to bolster their sense of belonging and better equip them in their spiritual growth. A table containing this theme, additional subthemes, and sample codes is in Appendix E.

Openness to innovation that kept the church Christ-centered. The FBO leaders reflected on their willingness to change how they delivered Christ-centered messages. They acknowledged that their strategies to engage millennials were part of a continual process of adaptation to their evolving understanding of millennials in various life stages and changing interests. The leaders considered whether the FBOs' major organizational partners aligned with millennials' interests enough to warrant increasing their active support and participation. MR2 specifically sought "partnering opportunities that are attractive to millennials . . . foster care, child welfare (kids on bikes), family welfare, or respite care, for example. Last year we partnered with and supported ministries in those categories to target issues that millennials care about." NB1 mentioned big outreach events involving "a backpack drive, a thanksgiving drive, [and] things that have a tangible earthiness to them that connect more with millennials as far as engagement." All leaders acknowledged the need to look internally to the church for what could be done better and to look to other churches or organizations for ideas that could apply. The leaders agreed that their approaches had to remain centered on Jesus's loving messages. Table 10 shows sample quotes of leaders' willingness to innovate activities and processes to engage millennials better.

Table 10

Sample Quotes of Leaders' Openness to Innovation That Kept the Church Christ-Centered

MR2	NB1	GR1
[Millennials had a] craving for understanding how the Bible connects with issues of today, culturally, politically, and out in the public eye. We adapt and relate the message in both the style and the content to be more attractive and be something that millennials can relate to. We've not yet arrived—it's a journey. This is very much an ongoing transition in our staff's approach to teaching and one that we have a long way to go.	[When asking dechurched millennials why they left the church, I ask them] why did they leave, and they probably left for a valid reason. How can we show them that they don't have to abandon God as a whole? Maybe a version of God needed to die for them. . . . They want to hear what Jesus has to say because what Jesus has to say is always attractive. . . . Jesus' principles haven't changed, but the way we interpret and present them might have. . . . Look at ourselves. What are we doing, what are we saying? Maybe they don't need to change, maybe we do? . . . It gives us an opportunity to look at ourselves, the church. The two critical things are to have a positive outlook on [millennials] and have a critical outlook on yourself and what do we need to do differently. We're all talking about the same ideas for the last 2,000 years. It's about finding new ways to frame the message that are accessible and palatable for this generation. We don't need to reinvent the wheel.	In the years ahead, my heart is that these post-grad families have leadership development tools to help them be a better leader in the marketplace in whatever they're called to do and not needing to come in and lead a Bible study because that's the old model. The new model should be us supporting people and encouraging them in what they're doing in their lives as a best business person, for example, a kindergarten teacher. Ask them what they need. We'd like to [start looking at] taking a different approach.

Balancing the planned versus spontaneous flow of activities. Although the leaders had a vision for their future, they struggled with how to plan and balance the structured versus free-flowing nature of activities when engaging millennials. Although millennials may prefer the organic flow of unplanned activities, it may be difficult for them to find out about spontaneous activities if they do not yet feel a sense of belonging to an FBO. As Drovdahl and Keuss (2020) found, a sense of belonging to a church precedes emerging adults' entry to faith; thus, building relationships through activities is a focus of a successful ministry.

Each FBO had planned activities occurring beyond the church, but—according to the routine activities listed in weekly, biweekly, and monthly calendars—the denominational Mercy Rapids used the most structure in creating them; New Bridge, the interdenominational FBO, followed closely in the number of planned events. On the other hand, the nondenominational Growing Roots had few events marked on the calendar. Most activities there were impromptu so that leaders could make time for one-on-one or small group ministering. Growing Roots, and to some extent New Bridge, embodied what some of the research on the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) found. For example, Studebaker and Beach (2012) identified how the ECM ministered to each faith community using an organic approach instead of the programmatic (near-formulaic) approach taken by megachurches. Grandy and Levit (2015) described how the church they studied provided a foundation of programs from which members adapted more meaningful activities as they and their leaders cocreated value. Table 11 presents sample quotes from leaders about how they sought to balance structure and flow in their activities.

Table 11

Sample Quotes of Leaders Describing Their Balance of Activities' Structure and Flow

MR1	NB2	GR1	GR2
Millennials want their activities and how those activities are planned to be more organic. They want it to be word of mouth because they were invited by a friend. They're less interested in the scheduled rituals of programs because we tend to be more spontaneous [here] in this state. We're interested in getting out there, depending on the season and weather. Millennials want to go to those things and want to be invited to those things. If it happens, it'll happen through their friend groups, which originate from our medium-sized groups, where people that care about them engage them.	I'd like to hold our gatherings more often. We've only been having these large gatherings monthly. I'd like them weekly, that way you can really build the relationships. But I know it takes a lot of resources to put them together. I think we'll compromise with two times per month. . . . Some have invited people. . . . Knowing people already is important. If someone you know is going to be at an event that is new to you, then it is easier for you to attend that event for the first time. It doesn't require you to have a lot of faith knowledge. It requires the courage to show up, then the people and loving, Christ-centered environment makes it a comfortable place.	I'm concerned about the right amount of tension between the organic nature of what we do here and how much we should build in a structure to what we do. You need structure, but how much? Most churches are overly structured; they don't leave room for life to happen because they're focused so much on figuring out which programs are best. A lot of us have grown in programs. But a lot of your life is life. We're back to focusing on Jesus, and Jesus's style of being highly relational.	Perhaps we need to equip other churches with building a sense of community. We need to equip our people for what they will encounter [when leaving us] because 90% of them will go somewhere else, that's the nature of our attrition in this city. We have to equip them as we send them. We have to help them be prepared for what comes next. We need more structure and organization for how we approach that equipping piece. Perhaps we need to offer a sending-out class on a relational level to talk with people about that.

Disconnecting online to reconnect in person. The FBO leaders recognized that millennials needed to disconnect from technology to reconnect with others in relationships and, accordingly, they innovated new strategies. They did not abandon social media strategies but instead shaped strategies according to their desired engagement with millennials. The resulting connections occurred both inside and outside of church environments and through platforms cocreated between leaders and members. Surprisingly, FBOs' online presence (on websites and social media) typically served millennials as only an initial entry point. Mercy Rapids has a millennial responsible for

communications; MR1 referred to social media as their *digital front door*. According to MR2, "Our social media presence is essential. We look at [which] social media platforms we should be on and how many. . . . How can we grow our social media presence? How can we involve more millennials in [that]?" Mercy Rapids placed millennial volunteers in charge of a photo booth with props that engaged multiple generations in a fun-filled event. Millennials at Mercy Rapids then documented the event through a photojournalism-type report on the FBO's Instagram and Facebook pages. Growing Roots leaders noted that they use Facebook Groups, which allowed private connections for church members who had moved from the college community but wanted to remain connected to the digital announcements and events. A discussion about changes in FBOs' digital engagement in light of the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, is in Appendix E.

Millennials primarily used group texting to maintain communications with each other and keep up with FBO activities. NB2 commented that millennials' "constant connection via text has led to friendships outside of the church because young adults want to hang out on their own." Texting served as a mechanism for regular virtual communications and helped people to grow relationships when not physically together. Nonetheless, NB1 spoke about the need to disconnect millennials from technology and reconnect them in person:

> We're more connected than ever with social media, but most people are lonely. They've got all these friends, but they have no one to talk to, and they don't know

how to talk to them because of that. Any time that we can create space to be with each other without a screen and connect is super valuable.

Intergenerational groups and mentoring relationships. Mercy Rapids leaders spoke about creating intergenerational groups to assist especially their older millennials in feeling connected and maturing through life events. Mercy Rapids leaders' success with intergenerational groups was in providing connections between millennials and people in the next stages of life or, as MR1 stated, "those who were further down the road in life and could provide some mentorship and advice, or at least commiserate because they had been there." Puffer (2018) suggested that volunteer mentors serve a vital role, with their empathetic listening, in validating the needs of millennials as they mature and strengthen bonds with church leadership. In Mercy Rapids, intergenerational groups provided mutual benefit for older generations because, according to MR1, "grandparents wanted to be around younger millennials in their 30s to share a vision with the next generation. . . . Our group members have provided positive feedback from being a part of it." Mercy Rapids had several mentorship opportunities listed on their website. Small intergenerational groups, dedicated to growing in faith, were listed on both the Mercy Rapids and the New Bridge websites; however, the Growing Roots website made no mention of intergenerational groups. Ultimately, Mercy Rapids's being a multigenerational church enabled them to support these groups and mentoring relationships.

New Bridge and Growing Roots leaders reported struggles regarding their lack of formal intergenerational groups and mentorships. NB1 discussed such a desire: "I

challenge [millennials] to take that onus and find [a mentor] . . . that is where you want to be in 20 years. . . . But the formal structure behind it we haven't figured out yet. We're exploring how that can look." Growing Roots leaders noted a lack of parental involvement in the millennials' lives; they suggested that millennials may need mentors who could nurture them in parental relationships. When older adults share their life perspective with young adults early enough that the young are still receptive to learning the *how* and *why*, their wisdom can prepare those young adults for future life stages (van der Walt, 2017). Intergenerational relationships help fill gaps in parenting that millennials may have experienced. Additional discussion and analysis about intergenerational dynamics at the FBOs can be found in Appendix E.

Theme summary: Remain open to innovating practices that keep the church Christ-centered. Critical self-reflection meant that leaders looked within themselves and outside the church as well, to innovate continually how they functioned. Although the leaders varied in their degree of self-reflection, none of them stopped innovating. This finding was consistent with research from Drovdahl and Keuss (2020). Drovdahl and Keuss found that Pacific Northwestern ministries that engaged emerging adults, designed ministries by committing to innovation, listening to emerging adults' doubting habits, and trying new activities or approaches to enriching adults' faith. The findings regarding this theme are also consistent with previous findings in the literature. Researchers have found that growing churches innovate practices to meet their participants' needs (Bloom, 2016; Grandy & Levit, 2015; Powell et al., 2017; Thiessen et al., 2019). Powell et al. (2017) and Thiessen et al. (2019) discussed churches that thrived by remaining Christ-centered

in serving their congregants. The theme of leaders' innovating their offerings by working interactively with millennials to design activities and worship events incorporates the VCC model. Grandy and Levit (2015) described how a church implemented VCC to adapt their ministry along with members, who were invited to write prayers during worship services rather than choosing words from a book of worship. In the VCC model, the continual, interactive engagement between stakeholders is the key result of mutually beneficial exchanges (Quach & Thaichon, 2017; Pera et al., 2016).

Although cases in this study had different resources for integrating mentoring programs, the benefits Mercy Rapids gained and other FBOs sought extend previous research on intergenerational and mentorship programming. Findings in this study are consistent with those of other researchers who have validated the benefits of millennials' relating to older generations through groups and mentoring relationships (Brown, 2016; Liang & Ketcham, 2017; Puffer, 2018; Williams et al., 2016). Additionally, Horan (2017) found that personal intergenerational relationships, role modeling, and mentoring are the most effective ways to strengthen millennials' spiritual growth.

The FBO leaders' communications via text with millennials showed dialogic rather than one-way communications that provide a novel contribution to the literature on FBO leaders' strategies to engage millennials. In practice, group texts enable an instant connection with a captive group to provide information, guidance, and support. Millennials can text confidentially when seeking advice from trusted peer groups and mentors. Communications built on trust and collaboration form the basis for mutually beneficial experiences within the VCC model (Hamid & Khan, 2020). Thus, the trust

and collaboration that build between leaders and millennials within FBOs' digital communications extend knowledge on the productive experiences inherent in the VCC model. On the other hand, in interviews, most leaders conveyed their preference for working in person with millennials to resolve their faith concerns. Consistent with previous research (Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2016; Wirtz et al., 2013), FBOs primarily used their online presence in social media and websites for one-way communications. However, once the COVID-19 outbreak took hold, the leaders adapted their strategies in innovative ways to offer more services online and respond online instead of in person. People also shared music and messages online, increasing their FBO's reach. The analysis on changes in FBOs' digital engagement in light of COVID-19 is in Appendix E.

Theme: Build relationships that extend beyond church. The FBO leaders understood and related to millennials by interacting routinely with them, establishing trust with them, listening to their stories, and sharing their own stories. Hudson (2019) suggested that faith leaders and teachers practice the art of listening to show those they minister to that they care for them through their presence. The leaders invested time in millennials, building relationships with them that extended beyond church walls. They related to millennials by meeting with them, valuing them and their voices, and caring about the issues that mattered to them. The leaders fostered deep relationship building that resulted in lasting connections within groups and one on one. They spoke about millennials' valuing authenticity that started at the top, with leaders, and filtered into relationships at all levels. Leaders set examples for millennials by devoting time to getting to know the people they served and understanding the circumstances of each

person. As leaders attended to congregants' and nonmembers' spiritual and life-skill needs, they also facilitated millennials' initiating nourishing relationships and fellowship with others that extended beyond the church.

Interacting routinely with millennials to relate to them. The FBO leaders conveyed that their understanding of the millennial generation stemmed from regular interactions and purposeful time spent with them. MR1 "devoted time to be present, care for, and listen to people because these qualities resonated with most people, not just millennials." Nevertheless, the leaders noted that millennials hesitated to commit to activities because they "awaited a better offer"; thus, planning activities was difficult. However, MR1 noted that "they will show up for what they care about and when they feel cared for," meaning millennials depend on relationships with others to feel a sense of belonging. The leaders focused on relating to millennials in their different life stages, but they also listened to them talk about the different circumstances and backgrounds from which they came to their faith. According to the leaders, widely varied circumstances influenced millennials in their ability to connect in relationships; thus, the leaders found they needed to adapt their engagement strategies.

Establishing trust through close-knit group interactions. Highly relational approaches to ministry translated to FBO leaders' establishing deeply trusting relationships within their congregations. NB1 used words such as "honesty and transparency," and MR2 spoke of ensuring authenticity when pursuing relationships so that "you can feel trusted and can trust others." GR3 described the importance of supporting and encouraging people: "Another strategy I use is to grab hold of the person

with those dreams and help them see those dreams through—no matter where they stopped pursuing those dreams. I'm running with you across the finish line." GR3 and GR1 reaffirmed the significance of people's relationships in helping each other grow in life and faith. GR1 attributed this closeness to members' seeing the church as a family instead of an organization. Porter (2019) affirmed that a person's having loving trust for another is an experience of deep fellowship; that person has a willingness to trust that another has their back. Extending the analogy to a congregation, people experience a sense of belonging partly because they deeply trust their congregation through shared will; thus, they experience deep fellowship because their congregation has their back. NB1 discussed how millennials valued leaders' being authentic in their approach to equipping them and how that authenticity led to more trusting relationships:

> People need to be real, be honest, and tell the truth . . . [because] that connects hugely with this generation. . . . We'd much rather follow a leader who is real than one who is right. . . . That's what makes people say, I can follow that person because I'm like that. I don't want to feel like I can't connect with you or that you are pretending to be better than me. . . . I can't reach that. I can't connect. . . . Even if you're not perfect, I already know you're not perfect. I don't need that from you. I need you to be honest.

Additional discussion about leaders' establishing close-knit groups to build trust inside and outside of church walls is in Appendix E.

Listening and storytelling. The leaders spent time listening to millennials' stories and offered stories in return to show they cared. For some millennials who had not been

shown those qualities from their parents, the leaders found those strategies particularly effective. I observed MR1 leading a group of 21 young adults and a couple of older mentors. MR1's interactions confirmed that listening to young millennials allowed them to feel comfortable sharing their stories of struggling to put Christ first. Examples of those struggles included how God is involved in a person's knowing whether to date or not, when it feels right to take a break, and who is in control, God or the individual. MR1's use of storytelling in an interactive group with mentors offered millennials messages of love and care during their struggles.

Leaders listened to millennials' stories of transformational faith. GR2 explained, "What goes on at the surface level is not quite the same as hearing the people's stories of . . . what they say they experienced or witnessed. It gives you real insight to something radical that's happening here for some." During the worship service, GR1 invited people to share their stories of transformation and testimonials about connections with faith. The people's stories resonated with others, and some shouted amens in response. Similarly, during New Bridge's worship service, its leaders shared texted testimonials from congregants who became closer to God during the previous month's fasting period. Storytelling connects people by helping them understand their labors and triumphs during their faith journey. When people hear and tell stories, they grow in faith, deepen connections, and serve each other and their communities (Fritschel, 2018), instead of struggling alone on their path. Additional discussion about leaders' using listening strategies to build relationships with millennials is in Appendix E.

Theme summary: Build relationships that extend beyond church. The findings in this theme are consistent with others' research that people's shared sense of belonging within churches is attributable to their relationships (Brown, 2016; Grandy & Levit, 2015; Powell et al., 2017). Drovdahl and Keuss (2020) found that a leader who can build relationships, and helps emerging adults do so, enhances those young adults' sense of belonging within their Christian faith. Putting this theme into practice, FBO leaders structured their events' timing and location to help people build relationships. Varying activity locations and times helped different types of people meet—millennials with older mentors, for example. The FBO leaders in this study reported that adapting to millennials' needs helped the millennials solidify relationships and thus thrive. Hamid and Khan (2020) found that stakeholders who participated in VCC outcomes advanced their relationships and developed a sense of belonging, process ownership, and community identity as they identified mutually beneficial social solutions. In this study, leaders' willingness to interact with millennials (demonstrated by listening to, share with, understanding, involving, and empowering them) resulted in enhanced relationships with them as they also developed a sense of belonging and community, directly tying to VCC outcomes. These findings extend knowledge regarding research on millennials and their involvement in religious organizations.

Theme: Empower and equip people in their faith, in their life, and as leaders. The FBO leaders focused on developing millennials by equipping them in faith and life skills to lead inside and outside of the church. The leaders prepared people for a faith they could apply in everyday life, not just on Sundays. They taught millennials first how

to learn, then how to apply their faith constructively. This theme encompasses empowering millennials as contributors in the church through leadership teams and in the community through service and vocations. The leaders supported millennials in many life skills: cooking, communicating, experiencing life beyond a comfort zone, overcoming challenges, becoming empowered through faith to be their best (e.g., in a vocation), being vulnerable, and using their voices. The goal was to help them change and grow in a healthy environment with nurturing parental figures. A table containing this theme, additional subthemes, and sample codes is in Appendix E.

Equipping millennials for a faith that works in everyday life. The FBO leaders sought to understand millennials so they could equip them in their faith and help them apply it in everyday life. The leaders' strategies to equip millennials in their faith included adapting to millennials' learning styles, interests, and environments. Being authentic in addressing the struggle to learn and apply faith involved taking on the elephant in the room—culturally hot topics. NB1 addressed these topics, especially dichotomies in faith, including how to equip millennials to accept both God and Son:

> We presented either/or options. For example, God or Son, when God wants to say 'and' because it is both. Most people think 'you have to choose one.' Many people leave the church over things like that because . . . they can't turn their brains off. . . . Instead, they want to take the whole Bible and toss it out. We try to address those kinds of topics that are reasons that people walked away from their faith.

NB1 explained millennials' conundrum with *both* as their trying to harmonize an irrational feeling, thought, or happening with the more rational way of thinking they have been taught. Understanding how millennials had learned faith previously, if at all, helps leaders to equip them from a positive standpoint, NB1 reported. NB1 focused on equipping millennials with faith tools such as how to read the Bible, which offers context to understanding the dichotomies of faith. Additional discussion about leaders' strategies for equipping millennials for a faith that works in everyday life, especially through the power of prayer, is in Appendix E. Table 12 shows sample quotes in which leaders spoke of equipping millennials using Christ-centered language to help them feel confident in applying their faith everywhere. The leaders used phrases such as *on-mission mindset, Gospel lens on, spiritually vibrant*, and pouring into leaders.

Table 12

Sample Quotes of Leaders' Equipping of Millennials

MR1	NB1	GR2
We have a continuous element of engaging people because that perspective represents a more holistic view of living out a Christ-centered life wherever people work so that they're always "on mission." Wherever they live in a neighborhood, they're "on mission." Wherever they're playing and recreating, they're "on mission." By having this holistic view of "always on mission," our equipping people of living out faith in everyday life and activities with a Gospel lens on is more sustainable and more biblical.	Two concepts we value are being intellectually honest and spiritually vibrant. That intellectually honest piece is something that connects with a lot of younger people, especially that walked away from the church. Having someone that stands up and says, let's have an honest conversation, let's use our brain, let's love the Lord like the scripture says to love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, and your mind.	My leadership time generally looks like pouring into individual lives, maybe mothering of sorts, but in a discipleship-type fashion. Discipleship is when I personally spend time with people and pour into leaders to make sure they feel supported; they are the ones who carry out the ministry work.

Learning real-life skills. The leaders recognized that millennials lacked real-life skills, which leaders identified as critical for functioning with others, particularly outside of church. GR1 associated millennials' developing life skills with their feeling valued:

> Millennials are trying to do stuff. They want to make a valuable contribution to society in many ways. . . . These post-grad families need leadership development tools to help them be a better leader in the marketplace. . . . [We should be] supporting people and encouraging them in what they're doing in their lives as [the] best business person [they can be], for example, a kindergarten teacher.

The leaders echoed Setran's (2020) suggestion that faith leaders should empower emerging adults, inside and outside of religious contexts, to lead, teach, and serve by employing their gifts and talents in teams—in worship music, for example. GR2 identified ways they support millennials when equipping them:

> I'll be kind and patient with where they're at by not expecting or demanding of them things they haven't been equipped in or don't understand yet. However, . . . everybody thinks they don't want to commit. . . . Some millennials have something deeper in them that wants to be challenged and grow. They want to be called to commit to something . . . more profound and bigger than just them.

Much of these findings on leaders' supporting millennials' growth in faith reinforce Puffer's (2018) findings on leaders' supporting millennials through their doubting habits. In Drovdahl and Keuss's (2020) study, young adults' practices for growing in faith included engaging in conversations about religion with no judgment of

others; these conversations strengthened the young adults' resolve to commit to faith and encourage others to grow in their faith.

Empowering millennials to lead and serve. The leaders placed millennials in leadership and support positions to equip and empower them. All leaders found that millennials wanted to see themselves—their demographic, gender, ethnicity, and ideals—represented in church leaders who knew their struggles and shared their vision. According to NB1, to reach millennials, leaders need to hire them, but they need to be authentic when doing so (for example, not hiring millennials just to say they are on staff). NB1 stated, "We've a mentality of growing younger that's key to our church's success. We value hiring younger staff and listen to them. They have opinions you can't quite grasp. We hire and trust them to run it because they know better." Table 13 contains sample quotes from leaders in Mercy Rapids and New Bridge who described their desire to represent more millennials.

Table 13

Sample Quotes of Leaders Representing Millennials Visibly in Leadership and Diversity

MR1	MR2	NB1
We represent millennials in visible roles in the worship service. We address who is visibly leading different parts of the service, preaching, and speaking during liturgical elements. We look at leadership roles for millennials in our [medium] and [small] groups.	Millennials will dominate the stage during the second service. We've tried to incorporate more millennials in serving communion. We've been attempting to diversify younger and more women in serving communion as a visible role.	We could say we have a value for diversity, but if you look up on the stage and everyone looks the exact same, they're not going to believe you. If you value reaching millennials, are you hiring them? Are they on the stage? Do I see that value in what you do? I think that's been a huge part of the early growth in our church.

Millennials served the church through visible and behind-the-scenes leadership positions in formal and informal initiatives. Leaders offered millennials the challenge of

leadership positions, which often helped them grow and mature both inside and outside the church. Placing millennials in staff leadership positions helped them discover what it feels like to be empowered, have a voice at the decision table, and accept ownership when in charge of something. Experienced Christian leaders understand the iterative process of learning to lead in grace; those leaders must therefore prepare their future leaders with training in both faith and leadership (Momeny & Gourgues, 2019). Offering millennials leadership at different levels, with the associated responsibilities, may prepare them as they mature into later adulthood, especially as they experience responsibilities outside of FBOs. MR2 described their formal process for new members: "a series of simple assessments to help people understand their gifting and interests better. . . . We use the assessments to help people understand how people can become more involved in the church and the community." MR2 provided a clear example:

> Millennials care about their coffee. The 60- and 70-year-old people were happy with Folgers; they didn't care. Millennials go to really nice coffee shops; they want good coffee. So, I listened to what they care about and placed a millennial in charge of that ministry. A millennial will bring their generational care and have different criteria for what we do with coffee compared to someone in their 50s and 60s.

I observed that care in action: Twelve different coffees from multiple exotic countries were available in the church's atrium. Multiple creamer selections and flavoring syrups accompanied the potpourri of coffees. Whoever oversaw the coffee ministry took the responsibility to heart; they provided a box for suggestions and one for donations of a

recommended dollar per cup. Additional discussion about leaders' empowering millennials to lead and serve is in Appendix E.

Theme summary: Empower and equip people in their faith, in their life, and as leaders. This theme's findings aligned with Drovdahl and Keuss's (2020) research on emerging adults in the Pacific Northwest, in which actively engaged young adults experienced spiritual growth through the support of others. This theme's findings also aligned with those of Setran (2020) in that FBOs supported millennials' development in positions both internal and external to the church. In Setran's (2020) study, leaders guided emerging adults in their jobs outside the church by helping them reflect their faith in their work. In Powell et al.'s (2017) study, churches successful at engaging young adults provided them support through their major life decisions: finding a home, marriage, parenthood, and career. When applying these findings to practice, leaders could share with young adults how the skills they learn in leadership positions apply in other vocations. These skills include making decisions, working in multidisciplinary teams, managing budgets, building and maintaining a schedule, planning and executing events, and carrying out a mission.

The leaders in this study encouraged millennials' involvement in the local community so those millennials could see the influence of their service. Carrying out acts of grace together in church groups and contributing to a greater societal good solidifies millennials' sense of meaning, builds relationships, and creates a sense of belonging to the church. These findings are consistent with those of researchers who found that growing churches have emphasized the importance of service in the local

community (Bergler, 2017; Powell et al., 2017; Reimer, 2012) and of Grandy and Levit's (2015) research on the VCC model outcomes in religious organizations. Grandy and Levit found that younger congregants who became more active in the church and its functioning, including outreach projects in the community, felt their engagement enhanced. Serving the local community and conducting outreach to the city in areas that aligned with millennials' interests were common themes across all FBOs.

Application to Professional Practice

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies that FBO leaders used to engage millennials. Findings from this study are of potential application to FBOs whose leaders struggle to engage millennials, even if the leaders have had success with other generations' participation. In the following paragraphs, I discuss why and how the findings are relevant to improving professional practice in FBOs. Four applications to professional practice include

- listening to millennials,
- establishing or formalizing mentorship opportunities,
- establishing or formalizing millennials' leadership opportunities, and
- establishing or formalizing forums for feedback from millennials.

The first application to professional practice is for FBO leaders to listen to millennials. Listening to millennials helps leaders understand them and their goals, interests, and learning needs. Empathetic listening is a powerful tool that FBO leaders can use to show their love, kindness, and sincerity (Hudson, 2019; Puffer, 2018). In one-on-one discussions with millennials, leaders can build trust (Puffer, 2018). Then, as they

gather new ideas and understanding from millennials' viewpoints and doubts (Drovdahl & Keuss, 2020; Puffer, 2018), they can convey their willingness to adapt (Powell et al., 2017). Listening shows millennials that leaders value their presence and involvement in the FBO fellowship. Listening to millennials can also help leaders identify activities that will resonate with them. Incorporating those activities into their programming, the leaders can then offer millennials leadership opportunities at a pace that works for them.

The second application to professional practice is for FBO leaders to establish or formalize mentorship opportunities. Mentoring relationships are important for young adults as they mature and reach milestones of adulthood. Mentors who have experienced those stages can provide millennials guidance as they navigate the various ages and stages of life. Intergenerational relationships have helped provide millennials positive moral support within faith communities (Brown, 2016; Liang & Ketcham, 2017; Williams et al., 2016). Also, as millennials' interests change and they seek guidance, mentoring relationships can be a natural resource. However, in considering mentorship programs, leaders need to assess whether they have enough older members who could meet the needs of the program. If lacking potential mentors, an FBO could partner with other FBOs to fulfill their needs.

The third application to professional practice is for FBO leaders to establish or formalize leadership programs, including placement of millennials in volunteer leadership positions. During initial one-on-one discussions with millennials, leaders may find millennials who desire such positions or who would like to enhance their leadership and vocational skills. Leaders may identify millennials for lay leadership training, if

available. Lay leaders (members who are chosen from congregations to lead) are considered separate from the clergy and may receive FBO-specific training for leadership. Beyond lay leadership, placement of millennials in other leadership positions that align with their talents can encourage millennials to use their God-given gifts inside and outside of the church (Setran, 2020). Whether in visible positions or not, active assignment of millennials within an FBO shows their value to the faith community. It reinforces learning of other job-related skills such as time management and commitment to a team. The organization's functioning may benefit from placement of millennials in leadership positions where they can put their ideas into action and help other millennials feel valued (Gorczyca & Hartman, 2017). Being in community with them, leaders can learn how millennials tend to interact and can evolve their practices to involve them and better connect.

The fourth application to professional practice is for FBO leaders to establish or formalize feedback forums with millennials. Leaders who incorporate millennials' feedback and hold millennial-led activities show they are flexible enough to adjust their practices. They are also better able to innovate their practices and keep the church Christ-centered to reach millennials. Leaders' committing to innovation in their FBOs means soliciting feedback, adapting practices to engage their congregation (Thiessen et al., 2019), and trying new ideas (Drovdahl & Keuss, 2020). When leaders realize they can innovate strategies while remaining Christ-centered in their messages, despite past struggles to engage millennial members, they may find renewed impetus to involve them.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change, expressed in terms of tangible improvements, vary according to individuals, communities, and organizations. Millennials, leaders, and FBO community members benefit from millennials' increased involvement in church life, including their community outreach and leadership. People who offer service, including millennials, become increasingly motivated by what Andreoni (1990) referred to as the *warm-glow giving* of altruism. Their intangible good feeling about their philanthropy results in their supporting additional initiatives to reinforce the feeling (Khodakarami, Petersen, & Venkatesan, 2015). Increased involvement in the life of the church and community enhances people's commitment, sense of belonging, and meaning in life. For example, in a scenario in which a millennial chooses to volunteer in a youth ministry and eventually becomes its leader, the positive impact on those youths' lives could confirm that leader's commitment and belonging.

Increased involvement of millennials in FBOs could contribute to greater societal good by expanding the FBO's outreach in the community with more volunteers. To increase millennials' active participation, FBOs in this study partnered with organizations aligned with the millennials' interests. Because millennials are interested in activities oriented to social justice and child welfare organizations, tangible examples of positive social change in communities could include more involved millennials volunteering through FBOs in those organizations as well as others.

Recommendations for Action

Several themes emerged from this study on FBO leaders' strategies for engaging millennials. Through a review of the data from interviews, observations, and documentation, I gathered the following five recommendations for action by FBO leaders:

1. Build relationships with millennials by placing greeters to help them feel welcomed and creating small groups close in age and life stage to help them feel known.
2. Create courses for equipping people spiritually at various levels of faith knowledge.
3. Establish private social media group pages, online meetings, group texts, and notifications.
4. Place millennials in visible leadership and worship roles.
5. Track millennial engagement through detailed demographic information according to their attendance, giving, volunteering, mission partner support, and other data.

These recommendations may assist FBO leaders who have struggled to engage millennials. The discussions below elaborate on each of these suggested actions.

First, to build relationships with millennials, leaders can add more greeters close in age to millennials, to learn their name and welcome them to the FBO. The leaders in this study found that millennials felt welcomed when called by name and that hearing their name made new places feel less imposing to the newcomers. Leaders can identify a

millennial task force, initially to be greeters. This group would be close in age to millennials and include millennial volunteers, a pastor of young adults, or a family ministry director. Task force members initiate first contact with millennials new to an organization, ensuring they feel welcomed. The task force would be a small group assigned to maintain routine contact with the new millennials to understand their needs and establish a rapport with them. The leaders in this study found that understanding millennials was critical to knowing how to engage them and being able to adjust engagement strategies iteratively to meet their needs. By understanding millennials, the leaders recognized that millennials desired connection in person with others. Generally, people have a psychological need to belong and build social connections (Rogers et al., 2018). However, millennials' desire to connect with others has not always extended to their religious connections, because some remain of lukewarm faith (Manglos, 2013). Thus, the next action helps millennials strengthen their faith in connection with others.

Second, FBO leaders can institute courses in spiritual equipping, involving open-to-faith questioning at various levels of faith knowledge (e.g., new to faith, on a years-long break from faith, faith familiar). One of the FBOs in this study offered a home-group alpha course for 20- to 30-year-olds. That FBO based their alpha course on a program that originated in England, and their instruction helps people new to faith understand the basics of the Christian faith, life, and God. The instruction is similar to apologetics but uses a conversational manner. Another FBO offered classes with an inductive approach to reading and understanding the Bible and how to apply it in life, for those seeking greater equipping in their faith. These knowledge-based classes can help

strengthen millennials' faith foundation without judgment. A judgmental approach is what Moody and Reed (2017) discovered caused many American millennials to disaffiliate from evangelical congregations. Millennials who are less active in their congregation but have an openness to spirituality may feel more comfortable building their faith knowledge in a learning environment with others of the same age, life stage, and level of faith knowledge.

Third, leaders can consider establishing private social media group pages, online meetings, group texts, and notifications. Although meeting in person reinforces warmth and other tangible physical and emotional connections that leaders described and observations revealed, part of reinforcing relationships with others is maintaining connections when apart. These private groups and online meetings are ways leaders can communicate regularly with millennials outside of church activities. However, millennials lack commitment. Maintaining a presence with millennials not only reminds them of upcoming church activities but can offer them support through prayer and daily devotionals (short faith instruction and prayer). Such consistent interaction might help leaders increase millennial engagement over time. Increased engagement involves a positive change in attitudes, emotions, and intentional behaviors rooted in a sense of belonging, identity, and passion for the organization (Kang, 2016).

Fourth, leaders can place millennials in visible leadership and worship roles. Initial examples are as greeters, as leaders of a group or activity, and as assistants in the service. Thriving churches commit to placing youth and young adults in leadership positions (Powell et al., 2017). Restructuring leadership teams of different levels and

assigning visible worship roles to millennials are actionable steps leaders can take. First impressions make a big difference for millennials, who value authenticity. If they do not see people of their age, ethnicity, and ideals in visible roles throughout the FBO, then millennials might consider leaving to attend a different FBO.

Fifth, church leaders can consider tracking people's engagement through detailed demographic information according to attendance, giving, volunteering, and mission partner support, for example. Some demographic categories to track are gender, birth year, family unit status, and church activity status. I recommend making these disclosures voluntary to protect privacy. Many churches already collect children's birth years for baptism but do not collect parental information. Leaders in this study tended to rely on their general perceptions and feelings of how successful their FBOs were at engaging millennials. Each leader spoke of using some kind of tracking mechanism, whether financial, attendance, or otherwise. However, they suggested formalizing these mechanisms so that, as happened in one case, a successful program is not inadvertently canceled because of a lack of data showing the program's success.

I plan to prepare an executive summary of themes and practical actions for FBO leaders to consider and will disseminate those through several venues. I could prepare a written or oral presentation for consideration at religious conferences held by denominational and nondenominational church associations. These findings might be relevant to attending clergy. Also, I could provide an abbreviated article of the findings and actions to the many church associations who communicate to their member churches through publications, resources, and newsletters. In addition, numerous nonprofit, faith-

related, or religious scholarly journals could publish these findings. Some examples are *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, Review of Religious Research, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* and *Religions.*

Recommendations for Further Research

Here are several recommendations for additional research about FBOs and leaders' engagement of people within them. I recommend that future researchers consider

- interviewing millennials, their mentors, and the full leadership team to gain their perspectives;
- adding quantitative data, as available; and
- reviewing the balance of online versus offline millennial engagement.

First, to complete the picture of FBO leaders' engagement of millennials within FBOs, I recommend that researchers include interviews with millennials to gain their perspective. As the sole researcher in this study, I lacked a team of researchers with whom to conduct a comprehensive study comparing, for example, how millennials felt their engagement by an FBO had increased over time with how leaders had adapted strategies to the millennials' life stages. With such a team, I could have interviewed more people within an FBO and gleaned a fuller picture of millennial engagement beyond leaders' perspectives. I recommend interviewing millennials, mentors to millennials, and the full leadership team to understand the priority the entire FBO places on engaging future generations, inclusive of millennials and subsequent generations. As

Powell et al. (2017) found, a focus on youth and young adult development was a fundamental characteristic of growing churches.

I also recommend that future research conducted in this area validate findings with quantitative data as much as possible. Churches have rarely kept attendance, financial, and other numerical data by demographic elements, making validation through churches' records difficult. Perhaps researchers could focus future studies on single cases through ethnographic or longitudinal designs to determine increased FBO engagement with congregational members.

Further research on engaging millennials and subsequent generations can focus on the balance of digital and in-person engagement as digital and online technologies enhance people's abilities to connect. Millennials in this study remained connected in their faith through in-person activities and enhanced those connections through digital applications such as group texting and private social media groups. The generation after millennials, known as Generation Z (Bergler, 2020), grew up immersed in digital connections with others and e-learning environments, with iPads handed out in elementary school. Further research may highlight how these younger generations adapt to learning their faith in e-groups. Because of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, many Protestant churches and their congregations have experienced an entire holy season and Easter in shutdown. They have had to adapt to online services, sermons, and e-Bible studies. Further research can highlight how successfully churches have adapted to online engagement with multiple generations.

Reflections

As an active and devoted member of a traditional Lutheran church, I undertook this doctoral journey after sincere and prayerful consideration. I felt this journey was an answer to a call of discipleship by the Lord to reach others through Christ Jesus. Discipleship represents reaching others with the word of Christ and spreading the good news of Jesus through the Gospel. I felt God's support and continual urging to persist as I struggled to find FBOs to answer the call. Thus, I reflected on the three FBO types I sought for my study. I wanted to ensure diversity in church types (denominational and nondenominational), city size (large and small), and church size to see whether there were differences in leaders' strategies to engage millennials across those elements. I was concerned that the FBOs I learned from might not be fully successful in engaging millennials. However, they each engaged millennials in millennials' life stages.

I had several preconceived ideas and biases according to my age, experience, and faith. These included

- sharing similarities in age but not all life stages because of my being a near-millennial and near–Generation X member—a cusper, as I called myself;
- having comfort with traditional worship services and some initial uneasiness blending in with contemporary services; and
- desiring to fully participate in worship services instead of merely observe.

Age was an essential aspect of this study. Thus, I told FBO leaders in the study that I was a cusper and shared some similarities with two generations. Leaders often asked whether certain things would likely resonate with someone in my life stage

(married with kids). I grew up attending church regularly (at least once per month), but after high school, between the ages of 18 and 28, I did not attend church regularly. As appropriate, I shared with FBO leaders that my husband and I decided to attend church routinely after starting our family. Also, I shared that we attend a Lutheran church, but I did not share that it is liturgical in tradition. Some of my bias may come from my familiarity and comfort with the liturgy (ritual) of a traditional denominational service. This comfort helped me resonate with the style of the traditional worship service offered by Mercy Rapids.

My unfamiliarity with contemporary services did not mean I connected any less with attendees or the messages presented at those worship services, although I initially feared it might. I am not used to raising my hands during songs and shouting alleluias and amens (in sincerity). However, I prayed for a heart and mind open to the possibilities of remaining unbiased. Ultimately, my unfamiliarity was with the order of services and less with feeling holy in the message. I felt the service was just as sacred and Christ-centered, but delivered differently than what I was used to. I immediately reminded myself that this might be how newcomers feel. As an outsider to contemporary churches' services, I often thought that contemporary Christian music should be for rock concerts and not for worship services. However, after attending four contemporary services at three different church types, I recognized that there could be a place for contemporary Christian music within liturgical services. Music moves people, and different types of music may move people differently. Leaders might consider incorporating a couple of contemporary worship songs among the hymns of a traditional worship service to engage

millennials. The lyrics, music, and message of a contemporary worship song are simple and Christ centered; the difference is usually the instrumentation. From conducting this study, I have come to believe there are numerous strategies with which leaders of traditional and contemporary churches can reach millennials to increase their engagement.

At each worship service, I yearned to sit or stand to receive the message and listen to the beats and lyrics within the music as they resonated in my heart. Instead, I had to remind myself to write field notes about the events. Nevertheless, I felt God's presence as I focused on the music, the message, and the people. My faith served as a lens through which I could understand, in deep appreciation, others' worship services and events. These offerings still felt impassioned and reverent to me, though different from the faith I had experienced in my life. Lutherans often use music and rituals to convey emotion for them rather than shouting unplanned alleluias and amens. However, through experiencing faith differently, I felt a deepening of my connection to Lutheran faith through an unabashed sharing of my passion for Christ.

Conclusion

There is not one correct answer for how to engage millennials in FBOs. The engagement strategies leaders in this study used varied according to millennials' life stages and individual goals. They also varied by location. What works for one FBO may not work for another. However, consistent across all FBOs was the dedication of staff to understanding millennials in their various life stages. Practitioners' evolving awareness of the needs of millennials in their changing life stages—single professionals, young

newlyweds, and growing families—helps them develop strategies that meet those needs. Millennials require a deeper, more palpable sense of belonging to stay with organizations. Young adults' shared sense of belonging within churches is attributable to their relationships (Brown, 2016; Grandy & Levit, 2015; Powell et al., 2017). Therefore, leaders need to understand the greater amount of time needed to listen and relate to millennials compared to previous generations. According to a Mercy Rapids Church leader, millennials "will show up for what they care about and when they feel cared for." When millennials feel that they belong, they want to share that feeling and may invite their friends to share that feeling with them. This continued invite is what increases engagement in FBOs and should be a major goal of FBO leaders.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Organization: _____

A. Introduction

Initial introduction through greetings and exchanging names.

B. Purpose of the Interview

Explain to participants the purpose of the study.

C. Confidentiality

Address the informed consent terms and explain the terms of confidentiality.

D. Expectations

Explain the use of recording and handwritten notes during the interview.

Provide the format and timing expectations for the initial interview.

Explain the process, timing, and format for follow-up with participants after the interview concludes, to collect additional information (as needed) or to review interpreted information for accuracy (member checking).

E. Participants

The population and participants will include faith leaders in three FBOs who have successful strategies for engaging millennials. I will interview the FBO leader, such as a head, assistant, or senior clergy member from each FBO.

F. Interview Length

Interviews will last approximately one hour.

G. Central Research Question

What strategies do FBO leaders use to engage millennials?

H. Sociodemographic Questions

1. What is your highest educational degree?
2. What degree did you receive from college (if applicable)?
3. Besides college coursework, have you received leadership or managerial training for organizational and strategy development?
4. How many years of experience have you had working in faith-related organizations?
5. How long have you had a leadership role within your organization?

I. Interview Questions

Considering that millennials, born in the last 2 decades of the 20th century, continue to age, and they compose the largest U.S. generation, the following questions apply:

1. Describe your role in your nonprofit's outreach programs to engage millennials. In FBOs, engagement occurs on a continuum and represents people's increasing involvement and commitment to an organization's mission and programs: first visits; repeat visits; contributions of time, money, goods, or services; recruiting others; and encouraging engagement from others.

2. What strategies do you or other leaders in the organization use to increase millennial engagement?
3. What strategies and tools assist you in relationships with millennials?
4. How does your organization measure or otherwise assess the success of programs in terms of millennial engagement?
5. What programs do you find work best for helping millennials to experience in-person engagement with other people inside or outside the organization?
6. What types of programs do you find work best for increasing millennial activity and participation within the organization? What makes those types of programs work well?
7. What programs, if any, did you stop offering or change because meaningful and valuable interactions among millennials and with the organization decreased or never occurred?
8. What influence do millennial engagement and the organization's relationship with millennials have on the success of your organization?
9. What additional information would you like to share about how you or your organization engage with millennials?
1.

J. Closing

Thank the participant for their time and schedule and request permission to follow-up and review information from the interview.

Appendix B: Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program Human Subjects Protection Training Certificate

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 10-May-2019
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 31567756

This is to certify that:

Jessica Schafer

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Student Researchers (Curriculum Group)
Student Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Walden University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wc84974bb-5b2d-4654-a766-00de1b13dfd4-31567756

Appendix C: Observation Protocol

A. Research Topic

Faith Leader's Strategies for Increasing Millennial Engagement

B. Protocol Purpose and Use

1. The purpose of this protocol is to guide my observations of FBO leaders across various types of activities in which they engage millennials.
2. I will use this protocol to ensure dependability in collecting observations appropriate for each FBO.

C. Facility Observations: Physical Spaces

1. For each observation event, I will request permission to photograph facilities where engagements occur (physically or virtually and inside or outside of various structures, for example) and what type of engagement activities occur (services, large gatherings, and meetings).
2. The types of physical observations to record include documenting in rich detail what facilities:
    a. look like (asking permission to photograph physical spaces),
    b. sound like (lots of conversing people, types of music), and
    c. any other details.
3. I will communicate that I do not intend to use photographs in the study material, but for later recollection.

D. Activity Observations

1. I will observe FBO leaders' engagement of millennials at programs, meetings, and services.
2. Through interviews, I will collect information about the programs, meetings, and activities that best demonstrate millennial engagement. Additionally, I will ask to observe a worship service, if not recommended by FBO representatives.
3. I will observe each FBO leader's strategies for engaging millennials. Some FBO leaders may be the clergy responsible for worship services. Other participating FBO leaders may be responsible for leading programs or communicating with millennials inside and outside of the church. For these FBO leaders, I will make every effort to observe their engagement of millennials.

E. Activity Observations: Programs (or Small Groups)

1. **People:** I will observe the FBO leader's interactions, attire, conversations, and body language.
2. **Action:** I will document whether anyone leads the event, what transpires, and sequence of events.
3. I will corroborate the intent of the program purpose through FBO documentation.
4. If the FBO representative recommends that I observe FBO leaders while engaging millennials in small groups, I will not record individual or

identifiable behaviors of anyone other than the FBO leaders who have signed consent forms.

F. Activity Observations: Meetings

1. **People:** I will observe the FBO leader's interactions, attire, conversations, and body language.
2. **Action:** I will document whether anyone leads the event, what transpires, and sequence of events.
3. I will corroborate the meeting purpose through FBO documentation.
4. If the FBO representative recommends that I observe FBO leaders while engaging millennials in small groups, I will not record individual or identifiable behaviors of anyone other than the FBO leaders who have signed consent forms.

G. Activity Observations: Worship Service

1. **People:** I will observe the FBO leader's interactions, attire, response to liturgy, and body language.
2. **Action:** I will participate in the service, if available. I will document the level of worship formality, involvement of the congregants in the service, type of worship music, sequence of worship, and events before and after service.
3. **Setting:** I will document where worship occurs, what the altar looks like, and the attire worn by the clergy.

4. I will corroborate the worship service presented with the FBO documentation. For example, if a church states they offer contemporary worship on their website, then I will validate whether that is the case.

Appendix D: Case Demographic Summaries

An overview of the three cases, data collected, and involved participants follows. I used location types and descriptions from the U.S. Census Bureau's (2019) geographic predictive models for the 2020 U.S. Census. As an example, all participating FBOs are in areas with higher-than-average levels of college-educated people relative to the national average.

Mercy Rapids Church

Location. According to U.S. Census Bureau (2019) data, Mercy Rapids is in a predominantly *responsive suburbia* area, characterized by a higher median household income and higher percentages of married couples and households with children compared to the New Bridge and Growing Roots areas and the national average. The Mercy Rapids area contains a mix of sprawling suburban housing, military properties, and universities, giving the city its transient character. Thus, there is a high percentage of single-family homes and renter-occupied housing units.

Leadership. Given their size, Mercy Rapids appears to have the resources to accommodate the needs of nearly any member at any faith maturity, age, or stage of life. The approximately 30-member leadership team of Mercy Rapids offers comprehensive training programs for leaders. For example, four people are assigned to coordinating administrative tasks, ministering to students and families, and tending to girls' discipleship. When Mercy Rapids does leadership, it fully dedicates someone to those responsibilities.

Worship services. Church attendance did not seem dominated during worship service by one generation but rather seemed balanced, like a multigenerational family at the Thanksgiving table. When compared to New Bridge and Growing Roots, Mercy Rapids appeared to have the most multigenerational congregation and the best representation of families, with all ages of children in attendance—consistent with the responsive suburbia demographic. Mercy Rapids was the largest of the three FBOs. Its first service averaged an attendance of 1,000 and the second service, 600; both services were roughly 70 minutes long. Observations of the two worship services helped me understand how Mercy Rapids related to a multigenerational congregation. The first service was more traditional and catered to a predominantly older crowd, and the second service was contemporary, with a younger crowd attending, generally. Although lighting was dim at each service's beginning, the lights came up and remained bright throughout the rest of both services. MR1 mentioned that a dimmed sanctuary was meant to establish an intimate feel, given its sizeable appearance.

Music differed across services. The traditional service had a substantial music ministry comprised of a powerful 30-member choir dressed in robes, multiple singers on microphones, and a bell choir, pianist, and organist. At one point in the service, the congregation burst out in applause for a performance. The contemporary service, instead of choirs, had a young praise band with five singers and a bassist, electric guitarist, acoustic guitarist, keyboardist, pianist, and drummer. As at the first service, two small screens to the upper right and left of the stage showed lyrics, to assist the congregation in singing along. The bulletin handout for the traditional service contained lyrics from

songs not in the hymnals, as an alternative to the screens. Alternatively, the handout for the contemporary service contained only short phrases and song titles to guide congregants.

The traditional service's ministry leaders and congregants were older than those in the contemporary service by about 10–20 years, and they wore more formal attire such as suits, slacks, and dresses. Those congregants appeared to comprise the oldest generations: baby boomer–aged singles and couples, and families from Generation X and late millennials. Alternatively, the contemporary service attendees and ministry leaders were predominantly younger. The lead pastor removed his tie and unbuttoned his top shirt button to dress down and match the more casual attire of the attendees, who wore jeans, sweaters, and sneakers and appeared younger; many were younger families and singles—Generation Xers and millennials. During the traditional service, congregants occupied pews on the lower and upper levels of the large sanctuary whereas, during the contemporary service, people occupied only two-thirds of the lower level. The lead pastor preached the same sermon in both services. The website contained sermons available for later reflection or viewing by those unable to attend service.

Observation anecdotes: Age and stage. Between services, dozens of groups scattered in rooms throughout the large building to meet according to their age and stage. Examples of groups were intergenerational groups; youth groups by grade and gender; and groups of college and postgraduate students, young marrieds, young families, people 40–60, and over 60. People in these groups discussed topics for learning, and leaders adapted their message delivery according to the group composition: interactive for

millennials to top-down for older generations. Although these groups averaged 20–75 people, numerous smaller groups formed and met more frequently beyond Sunday to grow in faith together according to their chosen learning units. Medium- and small-group learning was consistent with New Bridge and Growing Roots, which also held several gatherings throughout the week according to age and stage in various-sized groups.

I observed millennials announcing the benefits of connecting with others in similar stages of life. Millennials shared their experiences in

- forming positive relationships,
- developing close-knit friendships,
- pursuing academic success,
- moving out of their parent's homes,
- becoming debt free,
- searching for jobs,
- finding a stable income,
- getting married,
- starting a family,
- providing for their family,
- solidifying their faith, and
- becoming healthy.

Observation anecdotes: Ministry for children. Many children emerged after the second service from the basement-level child check-in. Mercy Rapids leaders commented on the rigorous updates in security, training, and facilities. MR1 touted their

new “electronic check-in system with little kids” and focused on bringing peace of mind to “young millennial parents [who] want to feel safe about knowing where their kids are and who they’re with.” MR2 addressed the overhaul of Mercy Rapids physical structure and documentation to address childcare: “We’ve focused on stringent policies, procedures, and training for our childcare workers. We’ve created lockdown environments and limited access requirements for the nursery and elementary areas. . . . We’ve addressed infrastructure concerns by creating safe environments. . . . Their kids will be safe.” Mercy Rapids leaders emphasized safety and security of children more than the other FBO leaders. Although New Bridge implemented security procedures and offered significant resources for kids on their website, the leaders did not mention these aspects during interviews. Family safety is important to millennials as they enter that adulthood milestone, but children’s safety may not be as relevant to single, childless millennials. Therefore, FBO leaders need to consider millennials’ needs at multiple life stages, given their FBO’s physical, human, and monetary resources.

New Bridge Church

Location. According to U.S. Census Bureau (2019) data, New Bridge resides in a *downtown dynamic* area. Compared to the national average and the Mercy Rapids and Growing Roots areas, the downtown dynamic area is characterized by higher percentages of foreign-born and non–English-speaking people, people of ages 25–44, and multiunit rental housing (more than 10 units per building). New Bridge being an interdenominational church, NB1 characterized its belief system as distinct from that of nondenominational churches, with whom they are often confused: “We believe

'nondenominational' is a choice to separate from what all the other denominations do. . . . [Instead,] we . . . take an integrative approach. To those who have been to other denominational churches, they may see familiar [other denominational] elements from time to time."

Leadership and structure. The church has 11 members in their leadership team that relies on a robust foundation of volunteers to lead and host a variety of events, including its regularly scheduled 60 small-group ministries. New Bridge's leadership established small group ministries (ideally of less than 10 people) to help people evolve in their faith, with some of the groups meeting according to time of day (men's breakfast, women's coffee time) or city suburb (e.g., the Westside Young Adults Coffee). Beyond the small-group ministries, New Bridge's dominant focus is its ministry for young adults, which represents a minichurch; it has group activities at small, medium, and large levels with and without faith elements. The lead pastor for young adults integrates young adults and their activities into the broader New Bridge congregation and its activities. Social functions with and without faith elements give attendees comfort enough to invite others. According to NB2, a core group of 30 young adults attends all functions, including worship services, whereas more than 60 young adults usually attend the medium-sized social functions but not the worship services. The small group activities of the ministry for young adults vary in attendance depending on the event (e.g., movie, hiking, game night). NB1 described these small-group social events as "activities without a faith element, which provide people an opportunity to build relationships without religious undertones in neutral spaces." NB2 confirmed that people who attend small groups

nearly always attend another young adults' group activity with religious undertones to formalize their connections with other people.

Worship services. New Bridge has three identically formatted services, as confirmed by NB1: one on Saturday evening and two on Sunday. I observed two worship services on one Sunday, which had lower attendance because of a weather event. Attendance at the earlier Sunday service was half of the 600-person capacity sanctuary space, and attendance at the later Sunday service was over three-quarters of the sanctuary capacity; each service averaged about 70 minutes.

Observation anecdotes: Music and imagery. Observations of the two Sunday worship services helped to clarify how New Bridge engaged a generally younger congregation than Mercy Rapids. The pastors, worship leader, and creative directors worked together to create a mood through music and message, that moved people emotionally. The leaders provided a hip, impassioned, and reverent environment by integrating music, lights, and visual imagery. The sound of pumping bass and keyboards welcomed people into a darkened sanctuary, with flashing announcements on a huge center screen and animation to the beats. Lights remained off or dimmed during the services except during the message, at which time they were raised for people to scribble notes on notepads, iPads, or phones, as they felt inspired.

Music dominated the services. The worship band consisted of a keyboardist, three singers, three singer-guitarists (electric and acoustic), and a drummer behind a sound barrier. Simple songs played with numerous repeated choruses. During the three opening songs and the last song, projected lyrics timed with graphics and animation

beamed onto a stage-wide screen behind the band to guide the vibe during songs. Spotlights occasionally searched the audience, giving the service a rock concert ambiance. The keyboardist played melodic chords and tunes in the background of prayers and testimonials. Congregants, hands raised, shouted out alleluiahs and amens in emotive response to the music and lyrics during choruses. The music, message, and ministry leaders were the same at both Sunday services.

Although attendees wore similar casual attire (sweaters, jeans, and sneakers) at both Sunday services, the attendees' demographics differed slightly. There were fewer attendees at the first Sunday service, making it easier to note clusters of friends and lone individuals, including multicultural and multigenerational groups. There were many millennial couples, most of whom checked their younger children in electronically to a sizeable *children's kingdom* wing of the building for education and care. Alternatively, with more attendees at the second Sunday service, it was challenging to find empty seats given the dimmed lights. The second service's being close to capacity made it difficult to distinguish where groups started and ended; families, singles, cultures, and generations blended, making for an intergenerational melting pot at the worship service. Many families (across multiple generations) had their children with them, in carriers and baby wraps. I was unable to distinguish whether there were any middle-school–aged kids at the first service; because the children's kingdom attendance accepted through fifth grade, I assumed that there were none at the service.

Observation anecdotes: Intuitive signage. Compared to the other FBOs, signage was easiest at New Bridge. The thoughtfully themed children's wing, adjacent to

the sanctuary, was decorated with castle-style lights, jewel-toned adornments (bright doors, faux turrets, archways), and themed classroom names (galley, treasure, fortress, throne, moat). Between services, people mingled, met to catch up with each other in their faith groups, or drank coffee and socialized at the coffee bar, above which a neon sign in teal blue lit up with New Bridge's mission statement. Informational meetings took place to educate church members on global engagement opportunities. I observed one such meeting about strategic partnerships for mission trips to help the church reach impoverished areas in work done with the love and truth of God, paraphrased from New Bridge's website.

Growing Roots Church

Location. According to U.S. Census Bureau (2019) data, Growing Roots resides in a predominantly *student and military community* area, characterized by high percentages of renters and people of ages 18–44. The area has considerably lower percentages of married couples and households with children compared to the Mercy Rapids and New Bridge areas and the national average. This community experiences the dichotomy of its house- or rent-poor, indebted students living near communities rich with income and culture.

The community houses, which are an integral part of Growing Roots's outreach ministry, are for leaders to place interns and congregational members in spiritual growth programs. These houses avail people of opportunities to connect, lead, and minister to others in what Martí (2017) and Studebaker and Beach (2012) described as *opportunistic places*—wherever they are. Growing Roots embodied faith expression similar to what

McDowell (2018) described as “beyond Sunday Christianity” and “being church in and through” everyday practices. GR1 confirmed this by saying, “Many churches place a lot of emphasis and resources on a 1.5-hour [Sunday] meeting when life goes on all week, Monday through Sunday, as a church community and family on mission together.” Given its proximity to the college and the high rents in the community, Growing Roots negotiated lower rental rates with community homeowners for its interns. Growing Roots screens all candidates, promising the homeowners a drug-free, paying, committed group of interns. In this way, GR1 reported, interns and other church members experience community living, a nurturing environment, and bonding with each other as they grow in faith together.

Worship service. Given its extensive outreach, Growing Roots single worship service on Sunday evenings represents one of the smaller aspects of its ministry. The service I attended started more or less on time and ended, with similar informality, about 2 hours later. Attendance doubled from the 50 who arrived on time to 100 congregants by the time the music concluded. The lack of punctuality appeared routine, hence the usual practice of starting with 35 minutes of its popular worship music. Attendees were single, young adult millennials, with a mix of cultures, and five Generation X and baby boomer couples. The worship band had two guitars, vocals, bass, grand piano, and drums behind a sound barrier. As did the congregants, the band wore casual attire: jeans, shorts, tank tops, and sweaters. The worshippers knew all the words to the contemporary worship music and sang them loudly, despite there being no screen with lyrics. Most congregants stood during worship music with their hands raised in fervent fellowship, but

some chose to kneel or move around the sanctuary to experience the music up close. When the music concluded, the pastor called for people to provide their testimonials of faith, which moved the congregation to shout amens. GR1 invited a guest speaker from a missionary to provide a witness story, a departure from normal Sunday services.

Influential worship music. Growing Roots worship music outreach has expanded with their use of the internet. Depending on the ministry platform, Growing Roots streams their music digitally on several websites across the digital world (YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music) or occupies physical space in different buildings within a college town. Except for the leadership meeting, every observed event had a significant music component, whether as background or as an essential component.

For Growing Roots, music helped people embody their connections with each other and God. As I prepared to interview Growing Roots leaders, GR1 mentioned the importance of interviewing GR3, their worship music leader. After interviewing GR3, I understood how worship music could connect 150 congregants in a small church with hundreds of thousands worldwide in a common Christian faith message: Jesus died for you. According to GR3, "When people listen, they connect with Jesus. . . . In the last 30 days, [we've had] 312,581 people listening on Spotify. That's the easiest way to measure that aspect of what I do here." Growing Roots ministry focuses on being highly relational, with one-on-one relationships. GR3 felt that being relational extended to those listening to their online music, even strangers:

> I get Instagram messages from people who hear about our movement or . . . music. I take that opportunity to share about what our movement consists of, and

> that it's authentic and not a super hype band. I explain that we're missionaries who enjoy making music. . . . [When I share] why our movement exists, . . . people are more inclined to dig deeper and even financially support our movement. . . . The purpose helps change what listening to our music is for them. I met my friend [Karen] through Instagram. She heard my music. I started talking to her about our movement. Two days later, she started becoming a $100 per month partner.

Fundraising from a small community was not enough. Traveling the world to play worship music concerts, however, was a conundrum for GR3. GR3 has devised multiple strategies to minimize barriers to people's experiencing their worship music. Growing Roots offers free music concerts at secular locations. To offset costs, they offer deals on merchandise and workshops for artists who want to create worship music. GR3 reported that Growing Roots uses Spotify's function for listing concert dates so listeners can receive notifications when Growing Roots is playing near them.

GR3 learned to reach millennials more effectively by releasing music singles (one song) instead of an entire album. According to GR3, millennials listen to music differently than other generations; they tend to digitally stream playlists of singles rather than buying albums. With platforms like Spotify and Pandora, millennials stream music without knowing who the artist is; only if they like the song will they save it to their library. Thus, the goal is to release singles appealing enough for millennials to add to their music libraries. Also, releasing singles allows these music platforms to rotate the songs onto playlists of music similar to the songs to which people have already

subscribed. GR3 mentioned that single songs are shareable and digestible because they allow millennials to focus on music in small sound bites. According to GR3, "If you send somebody an album, they might not listen to [it] that day. A single takes 3 minutes to listen to. You've captivated their attention. They'll repost it to share the song with all their friends."

Observation anecdotes: Life-on-life. I was blessed to stay onsite in a community house and observe their everyday ministering in action. The leaders select interns, who apply from around the world or from within the community, to rotate through 6-week programs to enrich their spiritual growth in the Growing Roots community. Thus, I observed church interns at various points within the program; they roamed through the main houses, which had a nearly open-door policy, I witnessed mothering and fathering moments between 40-year-old leaders and young adults in their 20s. GR2 balanced a hectic schedule of homeschooling children and managing a family calendar, while program interns would enter the crowded kitchen and ask GR2 for prayers or help with job interviews or sorting out their schedules. Meanwhile, GR1 had a revolving door of appointments, guest speakers to plan for, program interns needing help with their faith or specific books to guide their path, and activities to plan through for the week. Throughout each day, GR1 and GR2 helped their respective children and program interns feel special about their progress in life and path in faith; their needs were met, there was always a little more food to share for an unplanned guest, and people stepped up to help where they could.

Appendix E: Additional Analyses and Tables of Metapattern and Themes

This appendix contains additional details of the thematic analysis process. Also included are details and tables supplementary to the primary analyses of the themes provided in the body of the study. The data gathered for this study include interviews with leaders; reviews of FBO documentation, both online (websites, multiple social media sites, and electronic media) and hardcopy (worship service bulletins, meeting summaries, and informational handouts); and observations of leaders' interactions during worship services, leadership meetings, widely attended large-group gatherings, informational mission meetings, and casual meetings centered around music.

During thematic analysis, I developed phrases representing central ideas or codes. I developed all themes primarily from interviews, but I validated them and obtained additional insights using observations and electronic and hard-copy documentation. I refined and grouped the codes and subcodes. Table E1 lists the initial codes and the prevalence of references to those code phrases across all collected data, as they occurred per FBO. This initial coding exercise revealed that the most prevalent codes represented FBOs' understanding millennials and creating groups to engage them.

Table E1

Initial Codes and Prevalence of References to Codes within Faith-Based Organizations

Initial codes	Number of code references			
	MR	NB	GR	Total
Know, understand, and relate to millennials.	48	55	80	**183**
Engage through a funnel of group sizes.	56	61	55	**172**
Build relationships that last.	23	36	88	**147**
Empower, challenge, and support millennials as leaders.	24	18	92	**134**
Equip millennials for applying faith that works in everyday life.	25	24	73	**122**
Represent millennials in leadership, culture, demographics, and ideals.	75	29	17	**121**
Create supportive, nonjudgmental environments with organic, less programmatic activities.	19	47	41	**107**
Adapt to millennials' needs to learn life skills and grow personally and intellectually.	24	15	60	**99**
Create a sense of belonging, connection to whole church as family, and a feeling of being valued.	21	27	31	**79**
Encourage intergenerational influences with groups and mentoring.	39	9	29	**77**
Promote a highly relational and emotional approach to ministry and ministering.	9	11	46	**66**
Employ music and artistic expression to connect people to each other and their faith.	7	10	48	**65**
Maintain an authentic approach to ministry.	22	15	23	**60**
Employ critical self-reflection regarding strategies.	18	20	19	**57**
Remain service-centered within community and church.	27	12	15	**54**
Connect digitally, but alleviate digital isolation.	22	13	19	**54**
Reach nonbelievers and ease their transition to faith.	14	16	20	**50**
Create fellowship around food.	8	11	21	**40**
Use prayer to connect people and expand their faith.	14	3	21	**38**
Generate Christ-centered messages and environments.	4	8	21	**33**
Relate through personal stories.	4	4	7	**15**
Celebrate the unique culture of church.	1	0	7	**8**
Change what is inside the walls.	5	0	0	**5**
Expand to larger millennial engagement opportunities.	3	0	1	**4**

Note. The shading represents a gradient from highest (darkest) to lowest (lightest) value for the number of node occurrences. I did not use a weighted average of the interview codes from each FBO in this table.

Metapattern: Understand Millennials

Table E2 shows the metapattern of leaders' understanding millennials—a foundation connecting all themes—and themes and subthemes.

Table E2

Metapattern of Understand Millennials and Its Components

Metapattern	Themes	Subthemes	Sample codes
Understand millennials.	Create a sense of belonging and family in welcoming, supportive environments.	Know, understand, and relate to millennials (who they are and their stage of life).	Be authentic in relating to millennials.
			Learn millennials' issues and concerns to show care and adapt outreach activities for them.
	Remain open to innovating practices that keep the church Christ-centered.		Practice empathetic listening.
			Understand millennials to relate to who they are, where they are in life, and where they came from.
	Build relationships that extend beyond church.		Help millennials be accountable by encouraging them beyond their lack of commitment.
			Learn millennials' names; people feel known when called by name.
	Empower and equip people in their faith, in their life, and as leaders.		Create experiences and opportunities for millennials to connect where they like to spend their time.

Table E3 shows additional samples of quotes from leaders showing the logic of their pursuit of understanding millennials before equipping them spiritually or providing experiences toward their sense of belonging.

Table E3

Sample Quotes Reflecting Leaders' Strategies to Understand Millennials Before Creating Experiences for Them

Mercy Rapids	New Bridge	Growing Roots
There's research out there about hearing your name, it's appealing and makes you feel known. So, we work on learning people's names. – MR1	We want to listen to you, hear your stories, understand your context without judgment. Tell us more about it. . . . We want to address the roadblocks or causes and factors of why people walked away from their faith. – NB1	Millennials can grow a lot when learning to pull out wisdom and ask questions. The ability to ask questions is a very weak muscle with millennials. They have so many voices because of an oversaturation of messages. Sometimes they feel they need to figure it out themselves instead of raising their hand to ask a question and have a dialogue about something. – GR1
My strategy is to have a personal relationship with millennials and to spend time together. I seek to develop an interest in things that are important to millennials. Share life and what is important in their life. – MR2	Talk with millennials. Be friendly. Remember their name. When someone calls you by your name, it feels like you met somebody, and you know somebody. The newness to being somewhere and with others is not as scary when you know someone. – NB2	So many people want to feel like they belong—it's like they have a vibe. I talk to those people and invite them into responsibility. Even if they have no experience in something like the sound team, I encourage them to be a part of *throwing down with us*. People feel honored and valued when they're specifically asked instead of me making a general announcement and asking for volunteers. – GR3

Theme: Create a Sense of Belonging and Family in a Welcoming, Supportive Environment

Leaders in this study considered how to shape environments, whether inside or outside the church, through their physical aspects (buildings, event locations, designs that evoke the senses) and people aspects (placements in leadership positions, activities, and group sizes). Table E4 shows the subthemes and sample codes of the theme for creating a sense of belonging.

Table E4

Components of Theme—Create a Sense of Belonging and Family in a Welcoming, Supportive Environment

Theme	Subthemes	Sample codes
Create a sense of belonging and family in a welcoming, supportive environment.	Engage through a funnel of group sizes, large, medium, and small, specific to age and stage (intergenerational groups, too) to build and deepen relationships.	Organize by age and stage: Young singles, married couples, young families, mixed generations.
		Use large groups as initial entry point.
		Create medium groups to allow for relationship building.
		Employ small groups to allow deepening of relationships.
		Promote intergenerational groups and mentorship to provide support to millennial singles and families.
		Prioritize safety and security of children.
		Build hangout time into group activities.
	Use an organic, less-programmatic structure for a welcoming, supportive, and nonjudgmental environment.	Create a welcoming, relaxed environment with intuitive signage.
		Provide supportive learning groups for those who question faith.
		Celebrate unique church culture through flexible events.
		Design interactive learning environments.
	Reach guests and nonbelievers: Ease transition to faith.	Invite new people and ease their transition to faith-centered events.
		Reach out to the unchurched, dechurched, and unbelieving in the city.
	Connect people to each other and their faith through music and artistic expression.	Use music's worldwide reach to bring people to the congregation.
		Connect to God and faith through music and artistry.
	Foster connectedness to church through a sense of belonging.	Provide hospitality to lessen transient feel of the city.
		Promote connectedness to the whole church by integrating young adult activities with church.
		Call people by name so they feel known.
	Embody millennial ideals, culture, and demographics.	Create visible and behind-the-scenes leadership roles.
		Attend to social-justice issues.
	Create fellowship around food.	Break bread; people connect when eating.
	Insist on authenticity and excellence in church actions.	Place millennials in alignment with their interests to gain their mission buy-in.
		Practice what you preach.

The leaders spoke in interviews of creating a welcoming, supportive environment in their FBOs. In my observations of events, I found considerable validation of that assertion: I watched people hug each other, reach out to welcome strangers with warmth and smiles, and make sure newcomers felt part of the group. Also, during interviews, Growing Roots leaders spoke of being in community with those they ministered to, to make themselves available. I observed that ministering in action as well. There was a near-constant flow of people whom Growing Roots leaders ministered to through prayer, parental advice, and spiritual equipping that I witnessed over 3 days. Table E5 provides the frequency of themes and subthemes as mentioned by interviewees, observed during events, and documented through online and print material.

Table E5

Frequency of Creating a Sense of Belonging and Its Subthemes Across Data

	Theme	Metapattern	Subthemes							
Data source	Sense of belonging	Understand millennials	Engagement funnel	Less programmatic	Reach guests	Faith through music	Connect to church family	Millennial ideals	Food	Authenticity
Mercy Rapids										
MR1 interview	**113**	8	30	14	21	1	11	14	4	10
MR2 interview	**64**	0	22	16	2	0	17	5	0	2
Interviews averaged	**89**	4	26	15	12	1	14	10	2	6
Documents	**37**	1	10	8	5	4	6	2	0	1
Observations	**26**	0	5	7	1	3	6	0	4	0
MR Total	**152**	**5**	**41**	**30**	**18**	**8**	**26**	**12**	**6**	**7**
New Bridge										
NB1 interview	**110**	2	23	37	26	0	10	6	1	5
NB2 interview	**62**	8	23	12	5	3	1	8	2	0
Interviews averaged	**86**	5	23	25	16	2	6	7	2	3
Documents	**20**	1	6	3	2	0	0	1	7	0
Observations	**46**	1	11	19	0	7	4	2	1	1
NB Total	**152**	**7**	**40**	**47**	**18**	**9**	**10**	**10**	**10**	**4**
Growing Roots										
GR1 interview	**70**	6	7	15	14	1	3	13	8	3
GR2 interview	**61**	2	16	8	10	9	0	9	4	3
GR3 interview	**59**	0	7	1	16	28	3	4	0	0
Interviews averaged	**63**	3	10	8	13	13	2	9	4	2
Documents	**18**	0	4	0	1	5	0	1	7	0
Observations	**45**	0	14	15	2	9	0	2	2	1
GR Total	**126**	**3**	**28**	**23**	**16**	**27**	**2**	**12**	**13**	**3**
Total	**430**	**15**	**109**	**100**	**51**	**43**	**38**	**33**	**29**	**14**

Note. The shading represents a gradient from highest (darkest) to lowest (lightest) of the concentration of themes across data types. Total lines in boldface. Theme and subtheme names truncated. Interview codes from each FBO are averaged.

The engagement funnel. The leaders from all three FBOs discussed engaging millennials in groups of various sizes, large, medium, and small. An *engagement funnel* evokes the image of giving newcomers ever narrower openings for engagement, to match their comfort levels: attracting them to the church through large-group activities until they are ready for medium groups, then for the more intimate small groups.

Large groups. The largest group activities were typically worship services or activities, by invitation, with expected broad attendance. For example, MR1 had external *invest and invite* events, "less threatening for those who may be unchurched," in which members were asked to reach out to others. Also, FBOs placed postcards in worship bulletins and on tables; leaders made announcements at worship services to remind members to invite others to large group events with food and music. Social media and websites also advertised these events for sharing by members or for strangers to learn about.

Medium groups. Medium-sized groups give millennials the opportunities to establish initial connections and build relationships with others. When meeting at least twice monthly, these group sizes can help millennials to feel more connected to others in even larger churches, thus, growing millennials' sense of belonging. Secular events represented opportunities to reach community people and ease their transition into a religious environment. Often, small groups met within secular contexts to reinforce friendships outside of the church.

Small groups. In the more formal small groups, of less than 15, people explored deeper relationships in which they could be vulnerable, sharing their personal stories of

overcoming struggles in life and faith. They met within and outside of faith contexts while continuing to grow in their faith and personal lives together. The leaders often spoke of millennials feeling deeper connections, vulnerability, and spiritual fellowship in small groups after they felt they were known. GR1 spoke about a 30-day challenge on Christian communion (receiving the sacrament of bread and wine as a representation of Jesus Christ) that a small group of six had done to reflect on the what the celebration of the blood and body of Christ meant. Similarly, MR1 felt encouraged about the success of small group ministries: "Our method may be slow, but Jesus started small with 3, then 12 about 2000 years ago, and that was his model of ministry—it was slow."

Millennial group integration into the broader church. The larger FBOs, Mercy Rapids and New Bridge, had dozens of medium and small groups dedicated to the spiritual development of young adults. These FBOs found that they needed to focus continually on integrating their young adult groups into the broader church activities. Otherwise, they risked the potential for these younger groups to operate independently of the full church. Also, when millennials are not integrated into the broader church, they may not benefit from intergenerational connections. Growing Roots had mostly millennials, however, thus, its leaders did not mention integrating young adult activities into the broader church.

Welcoming environments fostering a sense of belonging. Leaders emphasized transparency and authenticity when developing topics with their leadership team. NB1 stated, "People want to know leadership is honest, open, and transparent in addressing culture, messages, or whatever your deliverable is. This helps increase engagement and

talk about what's important, what interests people, and that leaders answer the questions people are asking." Listening communicates to millennials that they are a part of the cocreation process and reflects leaders' flexibility to changing the process (Pera et al., 2016). In response to feeling heard, millennials open up to offering their ideas or expressing their doubts (Drovdahl & Keuss, 2020). NB1 commented, "We tend to answer questions that no one is asking." Equipping people with a real-life faith provides meaning. GR1 described success with equipping people spiritually in small groups:

> I watched how my group engaged in our four daily habits. . . . They're following through with it, sending me their morning or evening routine, meeting up with their partner, talking about their habits. They have a level of ownership that you can see them grasping. . . . You're seeing their interest in something they're learning that they can reiterate it back and apply what they learn.

Applying supportive practices for growing faith in welcoming environments solidifies a foundation of belonging for millennials, given some of their tendencies to doubt religious belief. Growing Roots leaders discussed a central focus of applying faith by asking two questions, according to GR1: "What is God saying and what are you doing about it? . . . We always follow up with putting those thoughts [from God] into action. . . . People need to become spiritually capable and to grow in their faith." Churches with Christ-centered principles often teach that faith permeates everyday life, and their leaders teach how their faith gives everyday life new meaning (McDowell, 2018; Powell et al., 2017; Studebaker & Beach, 2012). Thus, teaching millennials how to apply what they learn about faith to everyday life, leaders can help grow millennials' faith beyond Sundays.

Unstructured hangout time. The leaders recognized the importance of *hangout* time built into all group types. Although New Bridge formally built hangout time into their group activities, the other FBOs approached the concept less formally. People often formed small groups spontaneously, which allowed for them to reconnect and catch up on each other's lives. For example, groups of three to five congregated in the church's atrium ahead of the worship service, couples shared how their kids' sports games went before starting a prayer group, and a few college students commiserated over professors and assignments. NB1 explained why hangout time is essential:

> [Hangout time is] the most important thing. Even as we encourage people to get into small groups in the community, be vulnerable, and share life with one another, how am I going to do that if I don't know you? I'm not going to come to your house and share my soul if I don't know you.

Leaders' shaping physical aspects of experiences. Leaders created dynamic experiences of belonging by shaping aspects of the physical environment. Finlayson (2017) found that spaces inside and outside a religious building evoke emotional connectedness in a congregation, its rituals, and its collective spiritual experiences. Thus, design can sometimes contribute to engagement. MR1 reflected on what creating an experiential environment meant:

> When someone walks into our [building], we are concerned about what millennials see and what they experience. . . . We need to have more greeters than we think because of maintaining a relational element. When millennials feel like someone knows who they are, then they feel warm and connected. We want

> the environment to be aesthetically pleasing. . . . We look at how well signage directs people. Does it make sense where you need to go to drop off kids. . . . We can change little things with a significant impact. . . . Dimming the lights is a cheap and easy fix for helping the sanctuary feel more intimate even though it is enormous.

However, leaders discussed dangers in making costly physical modifications for little gain in engaging millennials. Also, Mercy Rapids leaders were unable to make decisions to attract millennials alone because of their multigenerational congregations. On the other hand, because of the cost of expanding beyond its physical footprint, Growing Roots focused solely on college students and risked disengaging postgraduate millennials who married and started families.

An alternative to modifying the physical design was to modify where and how events took place. Food, music, and games connected millennials with other millennials, leaders, and the FBOs. All FBOs had events in which people gathered around food. MR1 explained, "When inviting a new friend to services, it's a lot easier if there's food involved. Food makes everything better." At each FBO event I observed, there was food. Millennials at Mercy Rapids planned an outreach event as part of its multicultural mission; they served ice cream and pizza. New Bridge had a young adult gathering with a food truck–style cappuccino cart and snack food. Growing Roots offered grilled food with presquirted condiments in religious shapes.

Each FBO gave away food to the community as part of its ministry, as I observed or read about in documentation. GR1 described their food ministry as "help[ing] serve

and meet their needs. We provide a demonstration of unconditional love." GR2 added that "eating together helps many people to bond. Of all the things that we've probably seen bear the most fruit, it's just gathering together for fellowship and break bread together." Beyond food, having music, whether prerecorded or live, created an environment that reminded people to relax. Each FBO had live music, whether a couple of millennials strumming acoustic guitars or a full praise band guiding everyone's singing along. Casual events included games such as ping-pong and cornhole. These events sometimes turned into full worship and prayer evenings; they lasted for hours and included a message of staying connected in faith and with each other. Millennials did not seem to mind the clock, staying to help clean up afterward.

Theme: Remain Open to Innovating Practices That Keep the Church Christ-Centered

Table E6 shows the subthemes and sample codes of this theme.

Table E6

Components of Theme—Remain Open to Innovating Practices That Keep the Church Christ-Centered

Theme	Subthemes	Sample codes
Remain open to innovating practices that keep the church Christ-centered.	Balancing programmatic and structured versus organic and free-flow approaches to meeting millennials' needs	Creation of new groups to meet needs of people in their life stages
		Group sizes adjusted to maintain group dynamics
		Activities where millennials spend time varied and prioritized
		Time spent with people adapted according to their needs
		Leaders' growing young with development of young people
		Outreach and church services adapted to millennials' interests
	Critical self-reflection of strategies	Intergenerational guidance: Do not abandon older generations to attract young generations.
		Insufficient intergenerational interactions in groups
		Formal one-on-one mentorships lacking
		Panicked mindset toward millennials is not helpful toward engaging them
		Reduced one-way Bible studies
		Strategy ideas for adjusting strategies gleaned from outside as much as from a critical eye inward
	Digital growth: Connecting with millennials in their digital world (text and social media)	Worldwide reach using digital platform; big engagement through little effort
		Social media and group text applications to arrange activities, listen to music, share the faith
		Website as one of many avenues to convey information
	Measures of success	Growth in numbers, relationships, groups
		Increase in millennials and volunteers occupying leadership positions
		Increase in spiritual and personal growth
	Christ-centered messages and environments	Remaining Christ-centered on principles but culturally relevant in delivery to reach those who are antiestablishment

This theme developed primarily through interviews, in which leaders described their strategies to adapt and innovate to engage millennials in their FBOs. However, nearly a quarter of the supporting data from Mercy Rapids and New Bridge came from

documentation and observations. For example, I observed a medium-sized group event in which New Bridge offered sign-ups for follow-on activities and leaders solicited input from those millennials to suggest or lead the activities that interested them. Table E7 displays these results and provides the frequency of themes and subthemes across data.

Table E7

Frequency of Remaining Open to Innovating Practices and Its Subthemes Across Data

	Theme	Metapattern	Subthemes				
Data source	Open to Innovating	Understand millennials	Balance structure vs. free flow	Critical self-reflection	Success measures	Digitally connect	Christ-centered
Mercy Rapids							
MRA interview	**107**	12	25	25	22	16	7
MRB interview	**66**	20	18	11	13	4	0
Interviews averaged	**87**	16	22	18	18	10	4
Documents	**29**	5	14	8	0	0	2
Observations	**17**	1	2	10	0	3	1
MR Total	**133**	**22**	**38**	**36**	**18**	**13**	**7**
New Bridge							
NBA interview	**62**	5	8	27	12	4	6
NBB interview	**32**	5	7	5	7	6	2
Interviews averaged	**47**	5	8	16	10	5	4
Documents	**5**	1	2	0	0	0	2
Observations	**11**	3	5	2	0	1	0
NB Total	**63**	**9**	**15**	**18**	**10**	**6**	**6**
Growing Roots							
GRA interview	**45**	1	26	8	4	0	6
GRB interview	**118**	3	50	54	5	0	6
GRC interview	**56**	2	14	14	2	18	6
Interviews averaged	**73**	2	30	25	4	6	6
Documents	**7**	2	2	0	0	0	3
Observations	**11**	0	8	1	0	0	2
GR Total	**91**	**4**	**40**	**26**	**4**	**6**	**11**
Total	**287**	**35**	**92**	**80**	**31**	**25**	**24**

Note. The shading represents a gradient from highest (darkest) to lowest (lightest) of the concentration of themes across data types. Totals are in boldface. Theme and subtheme names are truncated.

Balancing the planned versus spontaneous flow of activities. The leaders struggled with balancing the scheduled planning versus spontaneous nature of events they plan, to appeal to millennials. S. Chan (2009) explained how the design of the church's worship services fluctuates according to the needs of church members. Liturgical

(ritualistic) worship is comprised primarily of preset texts and prayers designed for those in the church to come together as a community. Nonliturgical worship, considered nonnormative, usually has no apparent structure but rather serves the needs of individuals in their personal relationship with God. In practice, for cocreated events, leaders might work interactively with millennials to design worship events, whether liturgical or nonliturgical, to provide continuity and structure. Grandy and Levit (2015) described how a church used VCC to adapt their ministry along with members, who were invited to write prayers during worship services rather than choosing words from a book of worship.

The approaches taken by FBOs in this study revealed that most first-time attendees were invited by active members or a core group of millennials—all people who felt comfortable extending the invite through word of mouth. Planned events represent a beacon of opportunity for engaging the unchurched, dechurched, and unbelieving. MR1 called these "invest and invite events [such that] ownership [is] on every member to know they're always on mission [to] invite others with intentionality." Those who already belong to the community or hear about the word-of-mouth events may be aware of the impromptu events. Although millennials might say the organic flow of unplanned events appeals to them, they must become part of the belonging crowd to hear about spontaneous events.

Surprising findings about digital engagement. Because I had no access to Growing Roots private social media groups, my analyses of social media reflect the updates only to New Bridge and Mercy Rapids and not the stagnant (greater than a year

old) social media sites of Growing Roots, which I found odd considering the reach of their worldwide worship music. After reviewing social media site engagement, I compared the three FBOs' community *likes* on Facebook, noting which had the greatest engagement over 6 weeks. Fewer than 5% of community members had engaged with the information posted on the FBOs' social media sites. However, I conducted another review after the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, which neared its peak in the United States at the end of March 2020 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). I documented an increase of social media likes from 5% to 15% for community members in Mercy Rapids and 1% to 4% for community members in New Bridge. Leaders adapted their strategies to engage with members in view of the stay-at-home orders issued in their states. The leaders provided their messages online, posted worship music and messages to social media, and received new levels of online engagement.

Intergenerational groups and mentoring relationships. Mercy Rapids leaders discussed the benefits of being a balanced, multigenerational church. Their intergenerational groups were critical to helping millennials transition through their married and young family life stages. MR2 said, "We found millennials older than 30 had less in common with younger millennials and wanted more intergenerational [connections] with other marrieds, single millennials, with some older people in the room." MR1 specified that older millennials "were beyond the 20s singles class because they were far removed from college, own a house, and were established in their careers. . . . There was also a gap for married millennials with older school kids versus millennials who had little babies." Intergenerational groups provided mutual benefit for older

generations because, according to MR1, “grandparents wanted to be around younger millennials in their 30s to share a vision with the next generation. It feels like a microcosm of a church plant [(a new church startup from an existing church)]. Our group members have provided positive feedback from being a part of it.”

Mercy Rapids and New Bridge listed many small intergenerational groups, dedicated to growing in faith, on their websites; however, the Growing Roots website made no mention of intergenerational groups. New Bridge and Growing Roots lacked formal intergenerational programming. NB1 proposed the benefit of establishing a formal mentorship program at New Bridge, as they discussed with millennials: “We’ll talk about the greatness of being together in young adults. . . . The wisdom that we pray for and ask God about may be locked in the mind of a 57-year-old woman . . . [who] would love to have coffee with you.” Growing Roots leaders similarly found they lacked sufficient intergenerational connections with millennials, as GR2 explained:

> Millennials are really hungry for mothers, fathers, and mentors to invest time in them. However, there is this huge disconnect between these generations, in that it’s both generations’ fault. I’ve even been in situations in churches, especially as a church leader, where I’m having to practically beg people to pour into me. I've had the hardest time ever finding a mentor.

Table E8 contains sample quotes from leaders discussing intergenerational dynamics.

Table E8

Sample Quotes of Faith-Based Organizations' Addressing Intergenerational Dynamics

Mercy Rapids	New Bridge
Our church had a gap in addressing those single millennials in their 30s. They didn't fit in the 20s singles class because they were far removed from college, had their own house, were established in their careers. They didn't want to be around other 20-year-olds. There was also a gap for married millennials with older elementary-to-middle-school kids and married millennials with little babies. In its infancy, we created the group, the intergenerational group because the core of single 30s and older married millennials felt like they didn't fit anywhere else. – MR1	Our young adult ministry is meant to be a bridge. Our idea is to engage people who really aren't engaged in the church. As we do that and create a space where they can encounter God and grow in relationships with one another . . . that would naturally lead to them taking steps across that bridge to where when you get married, you might stop coming to a young adults group. Still, we care that you are a part of the fabric of this church and being committed to living in family with other people. . . . We'll talk about the greatness of being together in young adults all the time, but . . . [we tell them to] get involved in a group and seek out a mentor. Find someone in the church who is older than you are. Hopefully, that life stage thing doesn't cause them to opt-out but pushes them further into the community. – NB1
We have a thriving married millennial community, but it has grown too big. Groups that grow too big lose the dynamics of fostering relationships in a medium-sized group. They're a victim of their own success. Next year, we'll split it to recreate the [right-size] group dynamic. The split will be hard because some friendships will have to stretch. We'll also create some smaller [groups] to maintain a size that fosters close-relationship development. – MR2	Being single is a huge marketing tool to get people to show up. I had a couple of friends who recently were engaged. They're wondering how long they stay in our young adult ministry. Our church offers small groups for married couples. We'll definitely continue to sit together at church services. However, I think soon that we won't attend the young adult ministry together. That's why our church has these small groups for marriage. Young adult ministry seems to be more for single people. People usually 'age out' or' 'marry out' of our young adult ministry here. – NB2, on the natural progression for young adults as they mature in life stages

Theme: Build Relationships That Extend Beyond Church

Table E9 shows the subthemes and sample codes of this theme.

Table E9

Components of Theme—Build Relationships That Extend Beyond Church

Theme	Subthemes	Sample codes
Build relationships that extend beyond church.	Know, understand, and relate to millennials (who they are and their stage of life).	Be authentic in relationships by caring about millennials' concerns.
		Practice empathetic listening.
		Understand millennials to relate to who they are, where they are in life, and where they came from.
	Build relationships and connections that last.	Foster deep, trusting, and lasting relationships in which people feel they can be vulnerable and honest.
		Invest time with millennials, life on life.
	Follow a highly relational approach to ministry.	Connect with those who feel alienated or isolated.
		Offer one-on-one time to build deep understanding of the path to faith.
		Be personal, social, and interactive with millennials.
	Foster intergenerational relationships in groups and mentorships.	Nurture through mothering and fathering relationships.
		Organize small multigenerational groups and mentorships.
	Serve together.	Engender tribal sentiment and service in teams or groups.
		Create a core group of active millennials.
	Relate to each other through personal stories.	Have people share their faith witness and transformation testimonials.

This theme developed primarily through interviews with leaders, but observations of medium- and small-sized group meetings reinforced the theme of people building close relationships. Also, reviews of website group descriptions, online calendars, and social media revealed FBOs' forming groups for people to connect and meet regularly to share stories. Table E10 provides the frequency of themes and subthemes as mentioned by interviewees, observed during events, and documented through online and print material.

Table E10

Frequency of the Building Relationships Theme and Subthemes Across Data

Data source	Theme	Metapattern	Subthemes				
	Build relationships	Understand millennials	Build relation-ships that last	Highly relational approach	Inter-generational relationships	Serve together	Personal stories
Mercy Rapids							
MRA interview	**45**	18	12	5	8	0	2
MRB interview	**38**	19	10	4	3	2	0
Interviews averaged	**42**	19	11	5	6	1	1
Documents	**4**	3	0	0	0	0	1
Observations	**3**	0	1	0	1	0	1
MR Total	**49**	**22**	**12**	**5**	**7**	**1**	**3**
New Bridge							
NBA interview	**64**	29	14	21	0	0	0
NBB interview	**17**	4	4	7	0	2	0
Interviews averaged	**41**	17	9	14	0	1	0
Documents	**3**	0	1	0	0	0	2
Observations	**4**	0	0	2	0	0	2
NB Total	**48**	**17**	**10**	**16**	**0**	**1**	**4**
Growing Roots							
GRA interview	**76**	36	18	19	0	3	0
GRB interview	**76**	22	18	17	14	1	4
GRC interview	**46**	21	10	12	0	3	0
Interviews averaged	**66**	26	15	16	5	2	1
Documents	**8**	0	2	2	0	4	0
Observations	**26**	3	7	3	9	1	3
GR Total	**100**	**29**	**24**	**21**	**14**	**7**	**4**
Total	**196**	**67**	**46**	**42**	**20**	**9**	**11**

Note. The shading represents a gradient from highest (darkest) to lowest (lightest) of the concentration of themes across data types. Totals are in boldface. Theme and subtheme names are truncated.

Interacting routinely with millennials to relate to them. During my observation of a leadership team meeting of 17 people (13 of whom were millennials), GR1 asked each leader to share "what they were thankful for or needed support [for] within this season of life." After sharing, I observed the leaders challenging and

encouraging each other to push beyond the inconveniences of life and "open our hearts to show people they're loved, they're family," according to GR1. On display in this meeting were (1) the broad acceptance of millennials as people struggling through life circumstances and (2) the encouragement of millennials in their various stages of understanding the challenges of leading others. The meeting as described demonstrates FBO leaders' strategies for learning about millennials as they continually seek to learn how to equip them.

Establishing trust through close-knit group interactions. The building of a variety of relationships by leaders in this study involved their developing trust, validating the concerns that millennials faced, and encouraging them through their life struggles. Relationships were not superficial but trusting and provided safety for people to expose their vulnerabilities. GR3 described how their small church helped people to get involved personally in each other's lives:

> Although we may not have a 5,000-member church [in attendance], . . . we've become that size because of the people who've come and gone, which honestly is my preference. . . . [It's] closer in an intimate way, and more personal between people. There's more possibility for friction between people because they live closer to each other. Alternatively, when you're part of a 5,000-person church, even for an entire year, you could potentially never be seen or become close enough to people to experience the friction that happens like the-iron-sharpens-iron experience. You need to get close enough for another person to show you a mirror of yourself and for [friction] between people to be an opportunity. We

> work through so many issues when we deal [with] friction in relationships with others; it's a leadership refinement process.

The FBO leaders noted that millennials hesitated to commit to activities because they "awaited a better offer"; thus, planning activities was difficult. However, MR1 noted that "they will show up for what they care about and when they feel cared for," meaning millennials depend on relationships with others to feel a sense of belonging. Brown (2016) found that churches are more likely to retain young adults when they feel connected to the congregation through peer, parental, pastoral, and intergenerational relationships.

Growing Roots leaders mentioned the criticality of close-knit groups and one-on-one relationships to their ministry style. GR1 spoke of the importance of church members living in a community with those they serve: "A lot of our church lives in this city, doing life, eating meals, working through their life issues, all together. . . . Our success is that we do all of this together—the whole shebang—as opposed to having Sunday meetings." GR1's approach reaffirms McDowell's (2018) practicing-faith-outside-of-Sunday Christianity and aligns with Martí's (2017) description of the ECM's opportunistic Christianity, which refers to assembling dynamically to discuss faith wherever possible. The characterization conveys how people were integral to challenging each other in growing spiritually:

> If you stick around long enough, people are in your face in the best way. You can't hide when you live amongst people. The community forces you to grow in many ways. . . . There's a positive pressure cooker . . . between regular people

being on mission and spreading the Gospel. Your faith is always being squeezed and spread to grow in a good way.

Table E11 contains a sample of quotes representing leaders' strategies to build relationships through social groups outside of the church.

Table E11

Sample Quotes of Leaders Describing Relationships in Secular Social-Group Activities

MR1	NB1	GR2
Our smallest groups are the primary way we see people establish meaningful relationships. Through those groups, people engage in social activities.	We'll encourage people to go out to lunch after church, or we'll have afterparties after our young adult gatherings where everyone goes out and eats together to build friendships and relationships.	We hang out, eat together, play games, whether in a field or going to parks. We'll have various forms of community dinners. We have a monthly family night at each of our community houses. . . . We'll cook hamburgers, play games like bocce ball or cornhole. Everybody hangs out. We focus not on our phones but on engaging people.

Listening and storytelling. Empathetic listening to millennials' concerns helped New Bridge and Growing Roots leaders find strategies to address the issues of broader audiences. Hudson (2019) suggested that faith leaders and teachers practice the art of listening to show those they minister to that they care for them through their presence. NB1's strategy was to listen to millennials and incorporate what they say into the sermon or group talks. "We try to understand that pulse over the year rather than from week-to-week because it'll change frequently." In Puffer's (2018) study, church leaders empathized with millennials by engaging in conversations and responding compassionately. MR1 "devoted time to be present, care for, and listen to people because these qualities resonated with most people, not just millennials." As confirmed

by Puffer (2018), empathetic listening might help church leaders offer millennials solutions for reconnecting with others and their faith.

This study's finding regarding leaders' use of empathetic listening as a strategy to engage millennials validates previous research by Puffer (2018) and Powell et al. (2017). Puffer (2018) found that leaders who learn empathetic listening skills generate strong bonds with young congregants. Leaders in Powell et al.'s (2017) study who empathized with millennials *felt with* them as they helped them on their path to faith. During my observations of medium-sized groups in each FBO, I found that leaders helped millennials feel more connected to others. GR2 viewed listening empathetically to millennials as equipping them spiritually with the need to listen to what God is telling them: "I help millennials grow in their faith. How are they seeing and relating to God? Are they surrendered fully to Him and growing in their faith as a result? I spend my time equipping them for those interactions."

Theme: Empower and Equip People in Their Faith, in Their Life, and As Leaders

Table E12 shows the subthemes and sample codes of the theme.

Table E12

Components of Theme—Empower and Equip People in Their Faith, in Their Life, and As Leaders

Theme	Subthemes	Sample codes
Empower and equip people in their faith, in their life, and as leaders.	Spiritually equip millennials for applying faith that works in everyday life.	Show millennials how to apply what they have learned.
		Grow and struggle in faith together—faith and life in their beautiful messes, especially in small groups where they can trust each other.
		Take interest in millennials and their curiosity about something spiritual and divine to learn.
		Teach the power of prayer to connect people and help them grow in their faith.
	Equip millennials with real-life leading, growing, and learning skills.	Engage millennials in committees for strategic leadership to guide and shape the organization; think young, prioritize millennials.
		Recognize that millennials have a voice; let them see their vision through; hold them accountable.
		Encourage locally minded service in the community.
		Encourage millennials to serve in the church, serve in positions they care about.
	Empower, challenge, and support millennials as leaders.	Challenge millennials with leadership opportunities and support them by trusting and empowering them.
		Listen to millennials by extending ownership in decision-making; provide a seat at the table.
		Instead of asking for volunteers, place millennials in leadership positions aligned with their talents.
		Facilitate personal growth in their challenges and learning opportunities.

This theme developed primarily through interviews, with supporting data from documentation and observations in near-equal coding, as shown in Table E13. For example, MR1 spoke of letting millennials lead and design all aspects of a major annual event, and I observed the execution of that planned event. Table E13 provides the frequency of themes and subthemes across data.

Table E13

Frequency of the Empowering and Equipping People Theme and Subthemes Across Data

Data source	Theme	Metapattern	Subthemes		
	Empower and equip	Understand millennials	Spiritually equip	Real-life skills	Empower millennials leaders
Mercy Rapids					
MRA interview	**47**	5	26	9	7
MRB interview	**54**	8	0	27	19
Interviews averaged	**51**	7	13	18	13
Documents	**19**	1	9	6	3
Observations	**25**	0	17	7	1
MR Total	**95**	**8**	**39**	**31**	**17**
New Bridge					
NBA interview	**61**	4	35	18	4
NBB interview	**20**	2	2	8	8
Interviews averaged	**41**	3	19	13	6
Documents	**21**	0	6	10	5
Observations	**22**	0	16	6	0
NB Total	**84**	**3**	**41**	**29**	**11**
Growing Roots					
GRA interview	**139**	16	60	34	29
GRB interview	**117**	5	40	37	35
GRC interview	**47**	2	4	17	24
Interviews averaged	**101**	8	35	29	29
Documents	**30**	0	9	20	1
Observations	**37**	0	16	14	7
GR Total	**168**	**8**	**60**	**63**	**37**
Total	**346**	**18**	**139**	**123**	**65**

Note. The shading represents a gradient from highest (darkest) to lowest (lightest) of the concentration of themes across data types. Totals are in boldface. Theme and subtheme names are truncated.

The leaders wanted their millennials to be equipped spiritually and personally for leadership within and outside of the church. Culturally and socially, millennials required support in understanding how their faith might apply in a variety of real-life applications and contexts.

Equipping millennials for a faith that works in everyday life. New Bridge and Growing Roots leaders described millennials as having a curiosity for the divine despite their tendency to rationalize divine acts that are outside of their faith knowledge. The leaders used positive wording and strategies to help millennials learn how to immerse themselves in experiencing the divine. Mercy Rapids plans to introduce a new program, "Asking for a Friend," designed to address such relevant topics in an environment where millennials can safely discuss burning questions they have about faith and their social terrain. New Bridge has faith classes with an inductive approach to reading and understanding the Bible and how to apply it in life, for those seeking greater equipping in their faith. NB1 reported approaching millennials nonjudgmentally to equip them with words specific to their faith path: "[We] address things during sermons, make it possible for them to take a step back in towards their faith. . . . Whether that's science, whether that's addressing this verse in the Bible . . . what the Bible is for, and how to read it." These GR1 described the authentic feeling that makes "[m]illennials keep coming back because they sense something real here, something life-changing; lives are being radically changed." However, GR1 recognized that millennials nevertheless lack commitment to these radical, authentic feelings. GR1 struggled with millennials' lack of commitment to what others have told them feels so real. GR1 believes that if the church supports millennials by equipping them spiritually and in everyday life, those millennials will eventually mature beyond their lack of commitment. Growing Roots offers a home-group alpha course for 20- to 30-year-olds. Its alpha course is based on a program that originated in England, and leaders' instruction help people new to faith understand the

basics of the Christian faith, life, and God. The instruction is similar to apologetics but uses a conversational manner. Knowledge-based classes can help strengthen millennials' faith foundation without judgment. Table E14 presents sample quotes in which leaders spoke of equipping millennials using Christ-centered language to help them feel confident in applying their faith everywhere. The leaders used phrases such as *on-mission mindset*, *Gospel lens on*, *spiritually vibrant*, and *pour into* leaders.

Table E14

Sample Quotes of Leaders' Equipping of Millennials

MR1	NB1	GR1
[Living out faith in everyday life comprises living] with an "on-mission mindset" [through] everyday activities, how they treat people . . . talk with them, treat them with kindness, and welcome them with honesty. This [on-mission] perspective of . . . interacting with others . . . makes us less programmatic than most churches.	This is a vibrant place where we say let's love God with this [points to heart], let's not turn our brain off when we read the Bible or when we come together as a church. All those things connect with millennials, and those values proved to be very successful.	I'm trying to apply these things that I teach. . . . They see me doing these things with them . . . the love I pour out. . . . I share my struggles, such as trying to build the habit of reading scripture before [using the] phone.

Power of prayer. The leaders found that equipping millennials with knowing the power of prayer helped them deepen their faith connection in talking and listening to God. From personal experience, I understand prayer as a form of communicating with the divine, whether alone or together with others, for needs or in gratitude for life's gifts. Some leaders have called prayer "the greatest wireless connection." J. M. Smith (2017) found that praying with others offers meaning to the listener because the praying person imparts subjective importance to the praying act. Every event I observed across FBOs began or ended in people praying for each other or the community. Prayer was deeply emotional for some, and for others it offered a chance to share laughs, love, and

struggles. During New Bridge's events, either keyboard or guitar music accompanied the prayer. The music helped people feel more deeply for what they prayed about.

MR1 described working with the church's communications director to sign people up for a 21-day "pray for the city" outreach campaign involving 1,000 members. Through mass one-way texts, Mercy Rapids connected church members around a common daily prayer goal and instilled (or reinforced) a daily prayer habit. MR1 also provided paper copies to any congregants who wanted them. Many believe in the strength of prayer, whether by few or many, and Mercy Rapids helped millennials understand a virtual way to connect in prayer for a common purpose.

Growing Roots emphasized the criticality of praying to live the faith in a person's life and to affect others' lives. Its activities included teams reaching out to the community by knocking on doors and standing on the streets with signs offering prayers for people. The efforts worked. I observed strangers who stopped on the street, opened their hearts about struggles or blessings, and asked for prayers. GR1 commented, "People often need prayers. They open their home to us and tell us what's going on in their lives. They'll yell to others in the house and say that we're there and ask others if they need prayers too." The church provided support to residents' needs through these prayers, and the community's openness to receiving prayer overflowed, even if some did not participate in praying.

Empowering millennials to lead and serve. The leaders knew that millennials wanted to be represented so as not to feel isolated but instead feel supported, encouraged, and empowered as leaders and as people who might be new or struggling in faith. NB2,

as a self-proclaimed introvert, felt millennials' placement as the lead of social group gatherings fulfilled two objectives: It helped them become more comfortable interacting with new people and it built courage. GR2 described their intentional focus on fostering leadership at all levels:

> We have a lot of leaders that come through here and a lot of people we've built into leaders. . . . We're going to expect [people to] become leaders. They get a voice in what their leadership looks like. They'll have young people pulling on them. We'll encourage them and hope they'll disciple others. . . . They'll be held accountable to the things God's telling you to do and how they're supposed to grow.

The leaders in this study encouraged millennials' involvement in the local community so those millennials could see the influence of their service. GR1 identified "millennials [as wanting] to do stuff . . . [and] mak[ing] a valuable contribution to society in many ways," an assertion that aligned with GR2's comment that "the more we can get millennials connected to the community, the more they're going to engage in what's happening with the church." Carrying out acts of grace together in church groups and contributing to a greater societal good solidifies millennials' sense of meaning, builds relationships, and creates a sense of belonging to the church. By challenging millennials to grow out of their comfort zones as followers, FBO leaders pushed millennials into accepting responsibilities. This finding is consistent with those of researchers who found that growing churches have emphasized the importance of service in the local community (Bergler, 2017; Powell et al., 2017; Reimer, 2012). Grandy and Levit (2015) found that

younger congregants who became more active in the church and its functioning felt their engagement enhanced. The theme of empowering millennials through service to the community extends findings from Drovdahl and Keuss (2020); the researchers found that young adults find ways to express acts of kindness that align with their passion to make a difference (Drovdahl & Keuss, 2020). Serving the local community and conducting outreach to the city in areas that aligned with millennials' interests were common themes across all FBOs. GR1 commented on how service to the community increased millennial engagement, when done authentically:

> Millennials want to make a difference. . . . They like to help serve and do these things that help them make connections. Millennials want an authentic relationship. They don't want to question whether they're being used to help make a difference because they can discern being used. They like to help in ways that they know make a difference in the community [while] feel[ing] a connection with others.

The leaders remarked that millennials are social justice oriented, consistent with research from DeVaney (2015) and Milkman (2017). However, Mercy Rapids and New Bridge participants commented that millennials' lack of resources (such as paid time off, ability to take time away from family, and financial stability) often kept them from participating in trips abroad. Instead, millennials participated in local community matters. Part of what millennials receive in carrying out acts of kindness is what Andreoni (1990) referred to as the *warm-glow* of altruistic giving, but they receive other benefits as well. Powell et al. (2017) affirmed that highly participatory leaders are successful in engaging

young adults when they challenge them to contribute to the health and growth of congregations.