

Book Review/Critique – Millennials in Ministry

Brenda L. Rush

Beulah Heights University

Abstract

This is a review of the book *Millennials in Ministry* by Jolene Cassellus Erlacher. This book outlined the needs, expectations, and values of the generation group known as the Millennials. The author reviewed the characteristics of each generation, explaining that all or the majority of this group is present in today's churches. Once this information was presented, the viewpoints of the Millennial generation concerning family, ministry, and relationships were discussed.

Keywords: Millennials, Baby Boomers, Silent Generation, Generation X, Generation Z

Millennials in Ministry

Book Review/Summary

Erlacher (2014) has written a book on the people in the generation who are known as the Millennials. Within the pages of this book, Erlacher not only presents who this generation is but presents information as to how they are interacting with other generations. Erlacher writes how this group of young adults view the church and ministry much differently than other generations and presents information, which not only helps the Millennials but leaders of this group better understand each other. Erlacher also witnessed dissatisfaction among some of the students who had previously attended the Christian University where she was employed and had interacted with some of the students on a daily basis (p. xi). Erlacher further noted in her interactions, that she had seen a tremendous passion for ministry among some of the students, and yet after they had graduated with theological degrees, and worked in ministry for a period, some had left the ministry and were working in different fields (pp. xi-xiii). The departure of the individuals from what appeared to be their passion prompted questions which she began to try and find answers. From these questions, a qualitative research study was begun by Erlacher to understand what had created the dissatisfaction among the students and what could be done to retain this group in

ministry (p. xii). The results of the study were published and is now the book, *Millennials in Ministry*.

Erlacher (2014) notes, “This book covered two and a half years of research which included interviews of over 30 Millennials who had worked in the ministry” (p. xii). The study consisted of individuals who were, “... born between 1980 and 1990, were between the ages of 22 and 32, and had served or were serving in ministry positions” (Erlacher, 2014, p. xii).

Erlacher (2014) also interviewed individuals from various backgrounds, who lived in different areas, from different denominations in the church and were members of churches with small to mega-sized memberships (p. xii).

The theme of this book that Erlacher (2014) relays is understanding that there are different generations in the world, in the church, and in the workplace today. Understanding the values, traits, needs, and beliefs that exist within each generation will help the generations work better together. This book is not only written to people who need to understand this generation, their leaders, and other generations but also to the Millennials to help them better understand themselves and other generations.

This writer considers this book a valuable resource. Erlacher (2014) outlined the book into four major divisions. Part one covers “Generational Traits”; Part two covers “Millennial Values in Ministry”; Part three is entitled “Ministry Needs and Expectations.” Part four is appropriately titled, “Practical Applications” (pp. iii-v). For eleven chapters, Erlacher (2014) includes a section for the Millennials and a set of reflection questions from the chapter’s topic, for the readers. In the final section, a chapter is dedicated to the Millennials and a chapter is dedicated to the leaders of the Millennials. One more chapter was included entitled, “Putting it

into Practice.” This final chapter contains tools to assist the Millennials and the Leaders of Millennials.

Generational Traits

Erlacher (2014) does an excellent job describing the traits of the different generations. This information is vital today to inform every one of whom they are working alongside. Erlacher begins his discussion with descriptions of five generations that are in today's churches.

Silent Generation

Erlacher (2014) explains this generation is a product of the Great Depression and World War II, born between 1925 and 1945 (p. 4). These individuals are considered traditionalist. Erlacher further explains how this group understands hard work and are very familiar with patience. Most of this group are retired as they are in the seventies and eighties, however, in the different churches, they are the group who are considered to have influence (p. 5).

Baby Boomers

This generation consists of adults born between 1946 and 1964 (Erlacher, 2014, p. 5). This group comprises the senior leadership of the churches. They are the decision makers and hold key positions. Erlacher (2014) pictures this group as retiring in the next couple of years, and churches “scrambling to fill critical leadership roles for future growth and success” (p. 5).

Generation X

This generational group is described by Erlacher (2014) “as the more independent and living in the shadows of the Baby Boomers and the Millennials” (p. 6). They were born between 1965 and 1979 (Erlacher, 2014, p. 6).

Millennials

Erlacher (2014) describes this group as being the largest generation as of this date (p. 6). It is this group which she chose to study. This is the group which is described as being the most

protective and the group that is the hardest to retain on the job or ministry (Erlacher, 2014, p. 6). This group was born between 1980 and 1995. Most publishers agree that the Millennials are a generation of young people who were born between the years of 1980 and 2000 and are ages 23 to 35 (DeVaney, 2015, p.11).

Generation Z

Erlacher (2014) does not provide much about this group because as she states, “it is still developing its identity” (pp. 6-7). They are the only generation that has experienced new technology since birth. They are surrounded by social media and have experienced many changes in society, in particular, the structure of the family. Erlacher presents the details about each generation so that the reader has an understanding of the makeup of each group. Having provided this information then Erlacher focuses more on the Millennials as she provides information concerning their values, needs, and expectations.

Millennial Values in Ministry

In reviewing the values of Millennials Erlacher (2014) points out how much they value and appreciate family. This group according to Erlacher is dependent upon family and views ministry as a family (p. 72). Operating in church and ministry teams like a family also has complications. Erlacher points out that Millennials look to family for encouragement and support (p. 67). Erlacher further advises, relying on the family may present challenges when making decisions, analyzing problems, and overall moving from young adulthood to adulthood (p. 67).

Erlacher (2014) sees the need to understand why the Millennials are experiencing so much difficulty in the churches today. This group is vital to the future of ministry and the more information available, the better. Garrett (2015) believes “Publishers across the spirituality and

religion spectrum are publishing books for Millennials ... with aging congregations and plummeting church attendance—particularly among the young— Christian publishers especially view these books as essential to their mission” (p. 17).

This writer agrees with Erlacher (2014) as she points out the differences among Millennials as compared to the Baby Boomers and the generation referred to as the Silent Generation. Erlacher encourages readers and this generation to remember the scripture in Second Timothy 3 concerning intergenerational mentoring and leadership (p. 7). This is a significant statement in this book made by Erlacher. This writer agrees that this generation must be prepared to continue to carry the torch in the churches of today.

Ministry Needs and Expectations

The material presented by Erlacher is a must read for all church leaders and Millennials themselves. This group has entered ministry based on values established by previous generations. Where Baby Boomers can understand the church being viewed as a business, Millennials see this as totally different. While others may consider themselves religious, Millennials choose to view themselves as spiritual. Motivations of the past, such as money, and position are not part of this generation’s goals. Erlacher (2014) points out that Millennials seek authenticity and if they do not feel valued in the group that they are working with, they will lose interest (p. 109).

Practical Application

Erlacher (2014) closes this book with a section dedicated to the Millennials, a section dedicated to the leaders of Millennials and a chapter dedicated to the application of everything that was presented. This writer was very impressed with how Erlacher addressed the

Millennials. The story of Joseph from Genesis 37 was used as an analogy. Empathy and encouragement were the themes used by Erlacher, and this writer feels they were very effective.

The chapter which dealt with the leaders of this generation reminded them of the need to be mentors and coaches. Erlacher (2014) says this generation requires, “feedback, affirmation, and support” (p. 135). Erlacher also encouraged leaders to utilize the assessments included in the book which outlined the traits, needs, and expectations. This writer was particularly pleased with this book and would recommend it to all churches and organizations.

References

DeVaney, S. A. (2015). Understanding the millennial generation. *Journal of Financial Service*

Professionals, 69(6), 11-14.

Erlacher, J. (2014). *Millennials in ministry*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press.

Garrett, L. (2015). On a mission from GOD. *Publishers Weekly*, 262(30), 17-18.