

***MISSIONS AND MILLENNIALS:  
MOBILIZING AND PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATIONS  
OF MISSIONARIES AND LEADERS***

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**9/2/2015**

**A study done by  
Mission to the World, PCA**

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

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*Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)*

*The glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair. (Proverbs 20:29)*

## Purpose

There is an overwhelming amount of research and information written about millennials, those born roughly between 1980 and 1995. Millennials currently make up the largest age generation group (75+ million) in the US. According to Pew Research (see chart on the following page), millennials will surpass the Boomer Generation in 2015.<sup>1</sup>

American Christian millennials come with a missional spirit that is different from previous generations. They generally have a greater concern for social issues, justice, and for local missions rather than international missions. Generally millennials want to make a difference, they desire to be mentored, and want to be trusted with leadership responsibilities. They are also willing to seek out new experiences, as exhibited in one survey where 91 percent said they expected to stay in a job for less than three years.<sup>2</sup> From a missions perspective, they are mainly interested in short-term global missions trips, and are hesitant to make long-term commitments.

This report seeks to convey observations and offer fact-based perspectives in order to help MTW further engage the upcoming generations for international missions. The purpose of this report is not to change MTW's mission—Christ has given that. It is not about MTW becoming more youthful—Christ sovereignly calls people of all ages to serve as international missionaries. However, MTW is responsible to communicate international mission needs effectively to all generations, to actively tell the stories of God's global work to people and churches so these generations are challenged to consider their call, and to offer all generations opportunities to serve in a variety of ministry situations. For the next generations, this means MTW's message, the means by which we deliver this message, and the opportunities for service must change.

**Millennials:** Those born between 1980 and 1995. Sociologists differ on the exact years that encompass the millennial generation. We cite these years because many reports use them.

This report and the recommendations in it relate to more than just the millennial generation. It includes issues MTW should address to engage the generation after the millennials—generation Z, those 18 years of age and younger. Aiming only at millennials is not sufficient. New ministries and practices also should target those who are 10 to 15 years away from becoming international missionaries. MTW cannot take baby steps or merely stand back and observe the upcoming generations—doing so will contribute to this and the next generation's retreat from investigating MTW as a missions agency and from international missions as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Fry, Richard. *This Year, Millennials Will Overtake Baby Boomers*. [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/16/this-year-millennials-will-overtake-baby-boomers/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/16/this-year-millennials-will-overtake-baby-boomers/)

<sup>2</sup> Meister, Jeanne. *Job Hopping is the New Normal for Millennials: Three Ways to Prevent a Human Resource Nightmare*. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2012/08/14/job-hopping-is-the-new-normal-for-millennials-three-ways-to-prevent-a-human-resource-nightmare/>

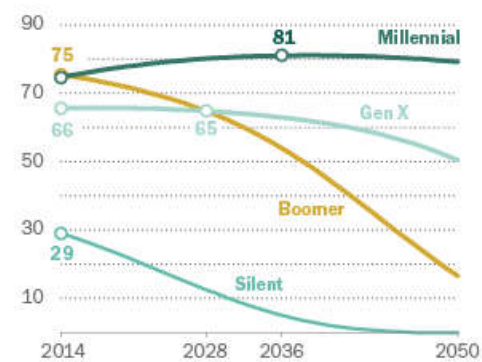
Through our conversations with millennials, we have heard how they have a greater burden for local missions over global missions. For MTW to mobilize the next generations effectively, we must communicate the need for international missions in a relevant manner. Millennials desire to serve, but they need first to hear and see international mission needs in a more personal way. That means changing how MTW relates to churches, groups, and individuals, both inside and outside the PCA.

We, the team of Carl Chaplin, Kendra Jeffreys, and Aubra Whitten, did the research presented in this report. The outline is as follows:

- **Part 1:** Themes for the millennial generation
  - **Part 2:** Obstacles and hindrances that prevent millennials and younger people from serving as international missionaries
- (Note: **Part 3: Recommendations** was included in the original report, but is for MTW's leadership only.)

## Projected Population by Generation

In millions



Note: Millennials refers to the population ages 18 to 34 as of 2015.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau population projections released December 2014

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Part 1: Themes for the millennial generation

The following information about millennials is based on information gathered from:

- Reading more than 3,000 pages of research and articles on millennials
- Six meetings with millennials across the U.S.
- An MTW-initiated online survey with 132 responses

Because aspects of their attitudes and behaviors vary greatly from their parents and grandparents, millennials can evoke various reactions from other generations. In their book *Millennials Rising*, Howe and Strauss identify seven distinguishing traits of the millennial generation:

**Special:** Millennials sense that they are, collectively, vital to the nation and to their parents' sense of purpose.

**Sheltered:** They are the focus of the most sweeping youth safety movement in American history.

**Confident:** With high levels of optimism, millennials are beginning to equate good news for themselves with good news for their country. They often boast about their generation's power and potential.

**Team-Oriented:** They are strong team players and desire tight peer bonds.

**Achieving:** This generation is on track to become the best-educated and best-behaved adults in the nation's history.

**Pressured:** Millennials feel a "trophy kid" pressure to excel.

**Conventional:** Taking pride in improving their behavior, they support convention—the idea that social rules can help.<sup>3</sup>

The impact of the technology revolution on millennials and the way it has changed how millennials relate to the world cannot be overstated. The smartphone and tablet invasion has changed the way people relate to each other

<sup>3</sup> Howe, Neil and Strauss, William. *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, New York: Vintage Books, p 43-44.

and how they view the world. Those under the age of 35 are tuned into the world differently and have different perspectives from previous generations because of the technological world in which they live. What happens on social media and other digital interactions is of equal importance to them as what happens in real life.

Millennials spend 18 hours per day consuming different media across several devices. User-generated content makes up 30 percent of that time (5.4 hours), second only to traditional media like print, television, and radio at 33 percent. But millennials trust information found in user-generated content 50 percent more than information from traditional media sources and find user-generated content 35 percent more memorable than other sources.<sup>4</sup>

The Christian contingent of millennials has much to offer any church or organization. However, we must first engage and listen if we are to help them serve as international missionaries. Millennials want to see change, are dissatisfied with the status quo, and yet want very much to learn from those older than them, particularly through training and mentoring. Millennials have a desire to lead and envision becoming the next leaders in businesses, churches, and homes. Millennials want opportunities for growth, development, and a career path. They are willing to do things differently, but want to do it in groups or on a team. Many desire to be entrepreneurial. The world of technology today has shown them they can do this:

Millennials have lived and learned in a world that is vastly different from that experienced by Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. Millennials have always had access to the Internet, have never seen a Sears catalog, have never used a dial to change channels on a television, and have often broken up with a significant other via texting or Facebook. This generation is used to giving and receiving feedback frequently. After all, they live in a world filled with Facebook, Twitter, blogs, message boards and texting where comments and feedback are made in real time. They will not be shy about telling you what they think about a topic or an event, so ask them directly about their strengths and weaknesses.<sup>5</sup>

Note: During the fall of 2014 and early winter of 2015, MTW hosted six focus groups with millennials across the country: two in Atlanta (one meeting consisted of MTW office staff), followed by meetings in Charlotte, Washington, D.C, Dallas, and San Diego. The three-hour events were each attended by 15-25 millennials, all of whom had been invited to the event by a friend, MTW staff person, or local church staff member. While all the participants identified as Christians, not all of them were necessarily interested in missions. Some of the main themes from the meetings are highlighted below:

#### Millennial focus groups facts:

- 86 participants
- 57% were 25-30 years old
- 56% were married
- 58% were male
- 95% had a bachelor's degree or higher

### *Theme 1: Millennials have a perception problem when it comes to international missions.*

To millennials, the word “missions” first refers to local service rather than international service. When asked about how they are involved in missions, the majority of them cited local organizations and causes. As a whole, they feel a greater call to local missions than international missions. As one respondent said, “There is so much need in our communities that I don't think all the international missions are necessary.” Or as another said, “What if missions for millennials means staying here?” When asked about places where the gospel is virtually non-existent or

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<sup>4</sup> Barakat, Christie. Ad Week. *SXSW: Millennials Trust User-Generated Content 50% More Than Traditional Media*. [adweek.com/socialtimes/sxsw-millennials-trust-user-generated-content-50-traditional-media/145430](http://adweek.com/socialtimes/sxsw-millennials-trust-user-generated-content-50-traditional-media/145430)

<sup>5</sup> Davis, Charles E. and Herrera, Anthony. *Closing the Generation Gap: Tips for Interviewing Millennials*, Today's CPA September/October 2014



Christians are not a majority, a pastor who had chosen to stay in the San Diego area stated, “But I see a big need here because I’ve got lots of non-Christian friends.”

During each focus group meeting, millennials unanimously agreed that as believers, they are all called to missions. “Missions is whatever serves Christ and the church, whether overseas or here,” said one D.C. participant. Every group cited the Great Commission and said that if they are not involved in missions, there is obviously a problem. They did not seem to view serving in international missions as very different from serving in local missions. As one Atlanta participant said, “Everyone is called to missions—it just depends on where you will be called to serve.”

At one meeting, a participant asked the question, “Does missions have to be cross-cultural?” Across the board, millennials indicated missions does not have to be international, that short-term trips (both local and international) count as missions experience, and that intentional outreach is a type of missions, especially in their workplaces. They acknowledge that a lack of resources and wealth doesn’t exempt them from being part of missions—there is an obligation to utilize the resources they have and figure out how to best give and be involved. Whether it be time, resources, or money, millennials realize sacrifice is part of being involved in missions. Recognizing their limited resources, they tend to focus heavily on having a personal connection to the causes and missions they support.

When it comes to their personal international missions involvement, most millennials said they were involved through prayer and/or financial support to missionaries or by short-term trips or internships. Many of them considered local cross-cultural experiences (tutoring refugees, working with international college students, etc.) as part of being involved with international missions. Some agreed they would be willing to move internationally for a job and stated that doing so would fulfill being part of international missions.

## *Theme 2: Millennials do not understand and define long-term commitments the same way MTW understands and defines long-term commitments.*

A common criticism of millennials is their lack of commitment in all aspects of life. As one Dallas pastor put it, “This generation is noncommittal in all things, not just missions—[thus] the idea of career missions right out of the gate seems scary to a lot of young people.”

One question asked to each focus group was how long they would consider serving internationally, or what a long-term commitment means. In our focus group meetings, there was not clear agreement on how long long-term missions is, with answers ranging from one week, one month, one year, a lifetime, and everything in between. Likewise, in our online survey, the answers were all over the map. However, a key finding in both the survey and the focus groups is that it is common for millennials to think of a long-term commitment in shorter timeframes than MTW traditionally has. A San Diego participant rationalized his answer of three to five years saying, “Right now, that’s our timeframe for evaluating things. We’ve finished college, we’re doing seminary, we just got married. We haven’t done [one thing for] longer than five years.” This helps explain their reticence to considering missions as a long-term career—they haven’t done anything for longer than five years, so why would they consider something as scary as career missions internationally?

**Q: What is your definition of serving long-term in missions (in months or years)?**

**A: 65% of millennial respondents defined long-term missions differently from MTW, with responses ranging from one month to three years.**

**- MTW Millennial Survey**

### *Theme 3: Millennials (and the generations following them) communicate differently from other generations.*

Earlier, we addressed technology as one of the defining characteristics of this generation, and as this Charlotte participant reiterated, the Internet is a vital component of being a millennial: “Going to the Internet is like walking the front door [of a church or organization]. It’s an extension of everything we do.”

Millennials have grown up with a wealth of information at their fingertips, and therefore are accustomed to finding exactly what they need within seconds. They ask Siri to remind them to book a dentist appointment instead of writing it on a Post-It note, consult Google Maps rather than ask directions, and determine if a place is gluten-free via Foursquare and Yelp instead of calling the restaurant. Therefore, when they encounter an organization that does not have a solid, clear online presence, they usually are quick to dismiss it.

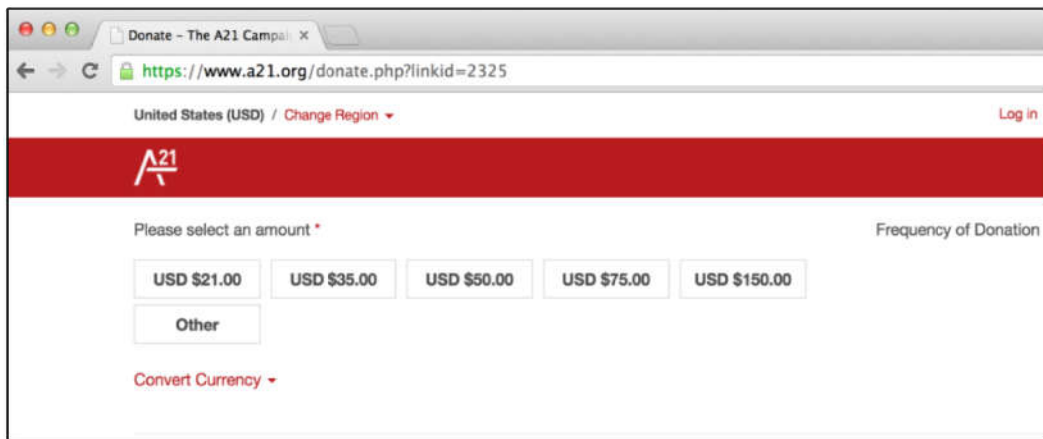
The only exception is if they know the organization is reputable and trustworthy. Participants in Charlotte and Atlanta agreed they would tell peers not to visit an organization’s website if it was poorly designed, but would gladly recommend and convey the organization’s message in person. As one Charlotte participant said, “You can tell the culture of an organization by their website and graphics. If your website looks like it was made in the ’70s, you’re not doing a good job caring for our generation.” While some might characterize this as overly harsh, it is true—non-profits like IJM and A21 are highly valued by millennials (as mentioned in our meetings with millennials, church staff, and seminary students) partly because their branding is attractive, clear, and appealing.

Another area mentioned was search engine optimization. If millennials cannot find you quickly, they will choose another organization that comes up first. Several participants mentioned they looked up MTW on their phones on the way to the focus group meetings, which brought up the need for websites to be mobile and tablet friendly. With the move away from computers (even laptops), websites must be compatible and user-friendly, especially when considering Generation Z’s preferences and devices.

While they may be hesitant to admit it, statistics show that as many as 91 percent of millennials are still using social networks like Facebook.<sup>6</sup> They use social media to learn about causes, and even consider supporting causes based on a friend sharing the information via social media. (Last year’s viral ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and the now-annual #GivingTuesday campaign are two examples.) Organizations like IJM, Charity: Water, and Blood: Water Mission are highly respected and successful with millennials because of their understanding of millennial preferences. They make their “sales pitches” with clear statistics (which illustrate a need), solid graphics and photographs, and appeal to the community mindset of millennials. Charity: Water encourages donors to start their own fundraising page and makes it easy to talk about the project. It is also clear how funds will be used. IJM and A21 make donors feel at ease even with “small” donations. Notice where A21’s suggested donations start, and notice how IJM clearly lays out what a set amount of money accomplishes:

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<sup>6</sup> Walsh, Mark. MobileMarketing Daily. *Mobile-centric Millennials Still Favor Facebook, Apple*.  
<http://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/218908/mobile-centric-millennials-still-favor-facebook-a.html>



10 friends give \$11	10 friends give \$30	30 friends give \$40	90 friends give \$50
One family rescued from slavery can receive Freedom Training.	10 aftercare packages can be given to survivors of sex trafficking.	IJM can provide investigations for one month.	IJM can conduct one rescue operation.

Communication through stories and statistics is key for millennial engagement. One Dallas pastor said, “Anything you can do to have missionaries describe their lives to millennials in person is great.” Millennials have grown up with a wealth of resources at their fingertips and expect connectivity and information wherever they go:



Millennials are the most informed generation to date and are influencing the way all consumers are interacting with brands. Now, everyone has a voice and the strongest brands of tomorrow will be the ones that listen, inspire and engage.<sup>7</sup>

In each city, participants gave examples of why statistics are meaningful and helpful. One Dallas participant said she was first convicted about serving in Senegal because a friend gave her a simple statistic: 94 percent of Senegalese are Muslims.<sup>8</sup> Hearing this prompted immediate conviction in her heart, and made her want to visit and minister in Senegal: “How could I ignore what she told me?”

The word mentioned over and over is “personal.” With the wealth of information available, millennials choose organizations and causes based on personal connections, stories, testimonies, videos, and small events. As one Dallas participant said, “Our age group is noncommittal and feeds on peer relationships.” They are willing to attend events with friends, and they want to hear about missions opportunities through people who have already gone on a trip or visited a field. The D.C. focus group unanimously recommended lower-scale events like in-home dinners to help capitalize on personal accountability. Millennials do not want a mass email—they want someone to reach out to them individually.<sup>9</sup> Organizations can capitalize on this by targeting and recruiting clusters, like a college sports team or club, because once the organization has a few key people on board, the rest will follow.

The results from our online survey show the importance to millennials of gauging the authenticity of an organization and the good and bad aspects of missionary service. The survey results show the important role social media plays in getting stories to them and learning about causes and ministries. See the two charts on the following pages:

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<sup>7</sup> Fromm, Jeff. *Fairness Is a Core Millennial Marketing Principle*.

<http://www.millennialmarketing.com/2014/10/fairness-is-a-core-millennial-marketing-principle/>

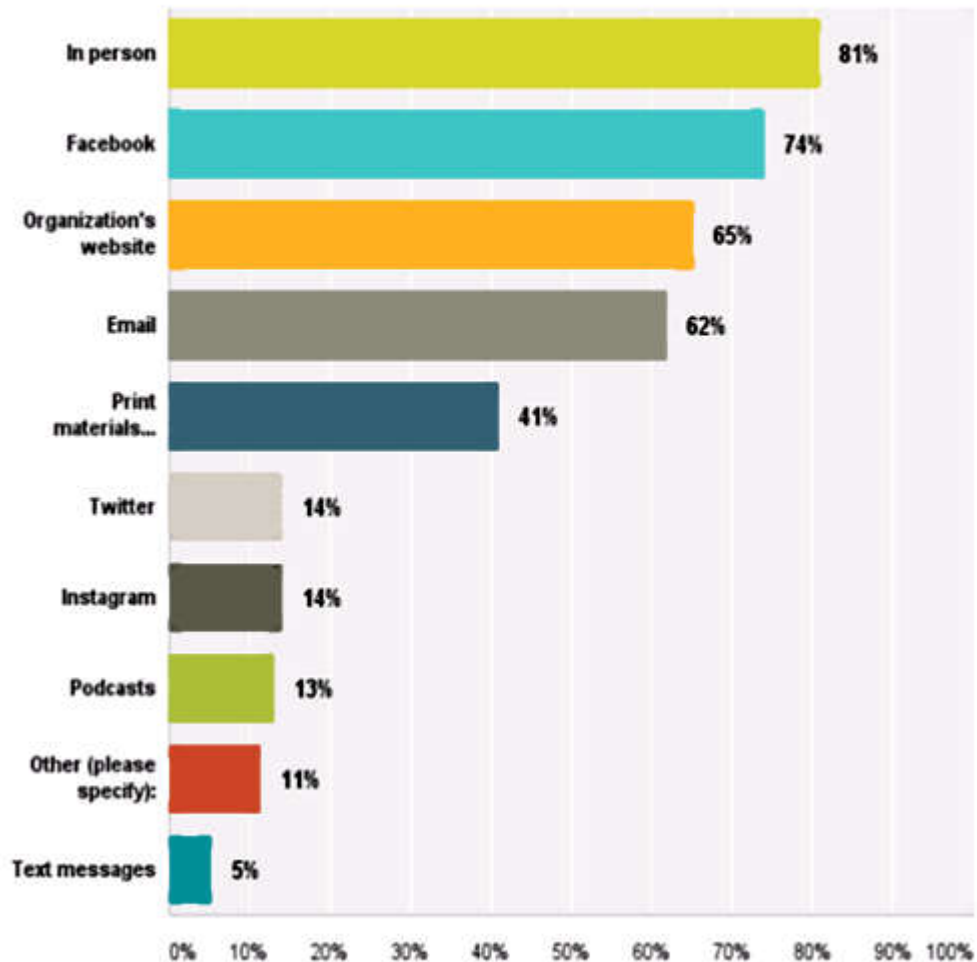
<sup>10</sup> The American Foreign Policy Council. *World Almanac of Islam*. <http://almanac.afpc.org/senegal> (Note: This stat was quoted by a Dallas participant, and the source was not given. We fact-checked it across multiple sources for accuracy.)

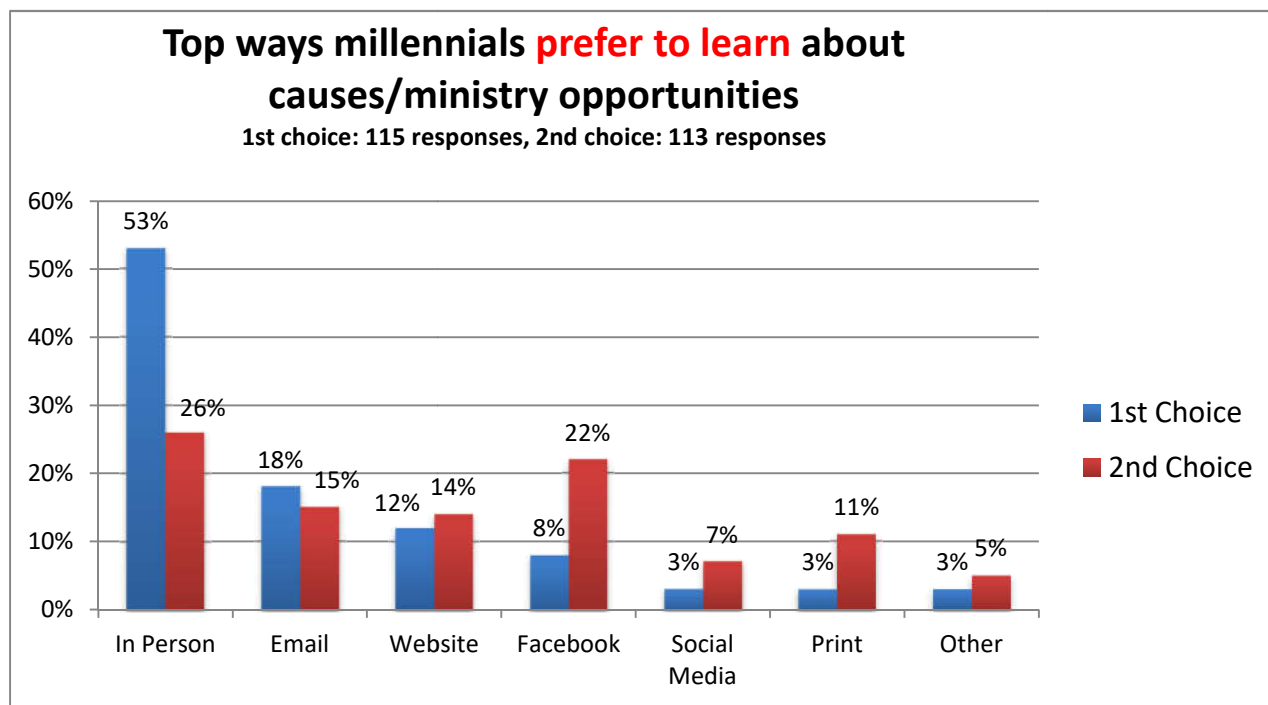
<sup>9</sup> Hu, Elise. *How Millennials Are Reshaping Charity And Online Giving*.

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2014/10/13/338295367/how-millennials-are-reshaping-charity-and-online-giving>

**Q10 How do you typically learn about causes or ministry opportunities? Check all that apply.**

Answered: 115 Skipped: 0





*Theme 4: Millennials consider money issues and fundraising as significant obstacles to serving as international missionaries.*

Many have argued millennials are not savers, are irresponsible with money, and have unrealistic starting salary expectations (or a combination of all three). However, studies show this generation is making less (especially going into their thirties) than their older peers did and therefore have less ability to save and budget well.<sup>10</sup> Articles from *Forbes* and *Time* show millennials make less than their parents did at the same age—and the recession is not completely to blame. In fact, millennials underearned their parents well before the recession began.<sup>11,12</sup> Many millennials are in jobs paying less than their qualifications, or are underemployed, but they view this as something unavoidable given the current job market.

<sup>10</sup> Thompson, Derek. The Atlantic. *The Incredible Shrinking Incomes of Young Americans*.

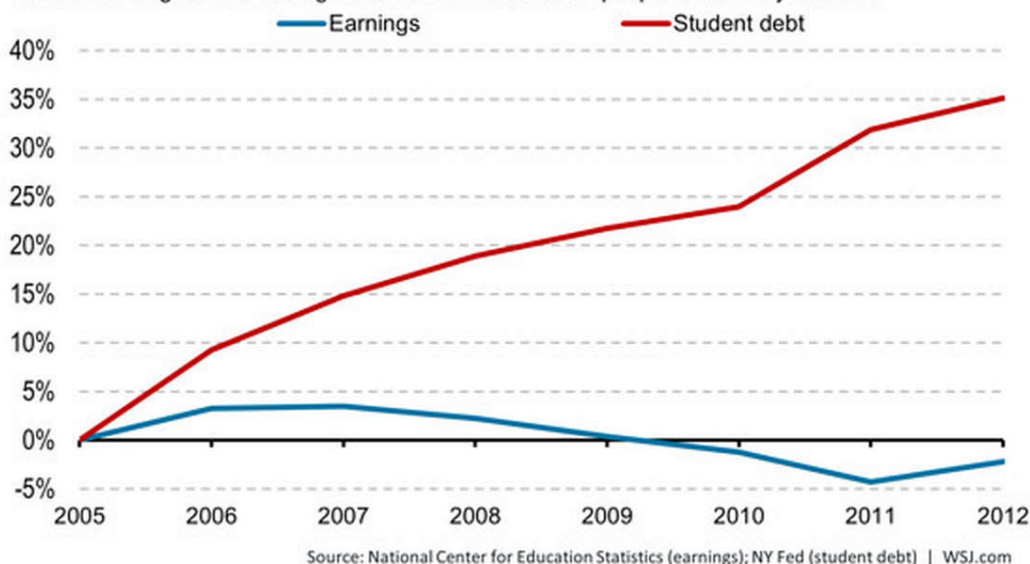
<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/12/millennials-arent-saving-money-because-theyre-not-making-money/383338/>

<sup>10</sup> Henderson, Maureen J. Forbes Magazine. *Millennials Earn Less Than Their Parents and the Recession Isn't to Blame*. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jmaureenhenderson/2013/11/30/millennials-earn-less-than-their-parents-and-the-recession-isnt-to-blame/>

<sup>11</sup> Sanburn, Josh. Time Magazine. *4 Ways Millennials Have It Worse Than Their Parents*. <http://time.com/3618322/census-millennials-poverty-unemployment/>

## What Young People Make and What They Owe

Percent change from 2005 in median annual earnings of people 25-34 years old holding just a bachelor's degree and average student loan balance for people under 30 years old.



While they are optimistic about their financial future, millennials are distrustful of established financial systems like Social Security—something that is well respected by some older generations—with 51 percent of them saying they do not believe there will be any money left for them in Social Security.<sup>14</sup>

Despite being the best-educated group of young adults in American history, millennials have and will continue to pay dearly for their education.<sup>15</sup> More than 70 percent of millennials have school debt from undergrad or graduate school, or a combination of both. In 2013, an average millennial owed \$28,000 post-graduation, and one in eight had \$50,000 or more in debt. The latest reports for 2014 indicate average debt is \$28,400.<sup>16, 17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Izzo, Phil. The Wall Street Journal. *Congratulations to Class of 2014, Most Indebted Ever*.

<http://blogs.wsj.com/numbers/congratulations-to-class-of-2014-the-most-indebted-ever-1368/>

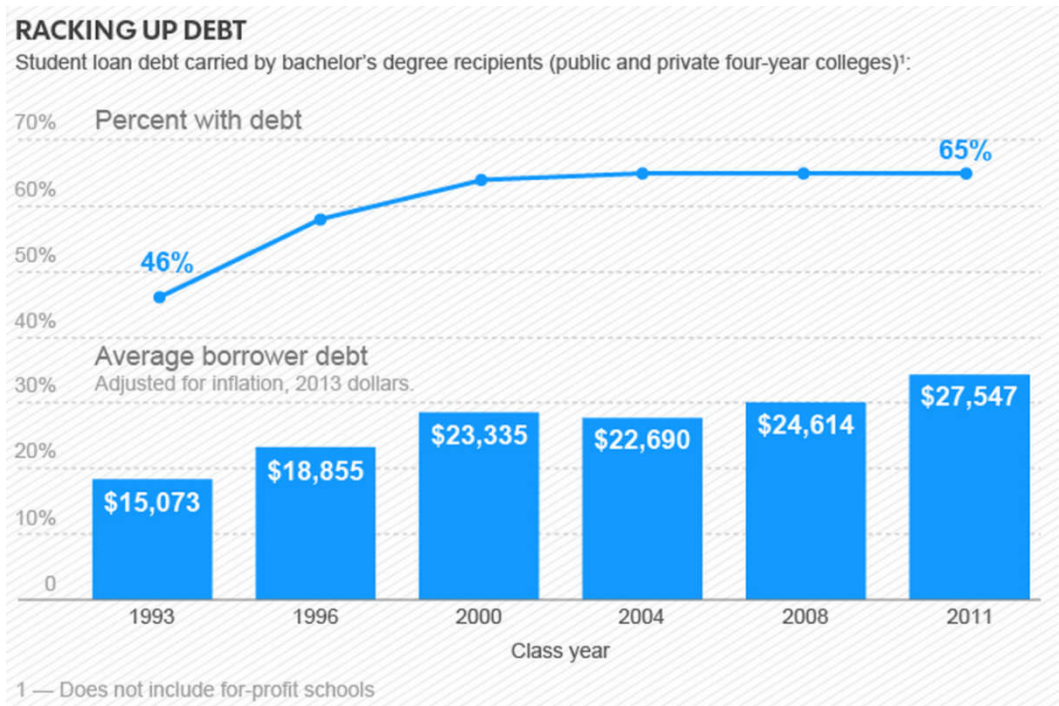
<sup>14</sup> Pew Research: Social and Demographic Trends. *Millennials in Adulthood*.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Brandeisky, Kara. Time Magazine. *Good News: There's a New Way to Get Out from Under Student Debt*.

<http://time.com/tag/student-loans/page/3/>



Fundraising is a huge deterrent to millennials. In each focus group, it was mentioned as one of the primary reasons hindering millennials from missionary service. They acknowledged sacrifice in many forms is part of being a missionary, but across the board, the thoughts associated with fundraising were negative. Some took a practical point of view and said they did not want to support-raise while they had student debt, either because they felt like it was financially irresponsible or because it was not how donors would want their money spent. Others worried about their ability to fundraise, citing a lack of adequate training as well as a limited pool of potential donors. They acknowledged their peers do not make enough money to support them at high levels, so networking with others outside their age group would be necessary, but time-consuming and difficult. Several San Diego participants said they did not like the idea of fundraising because it meant doing it full-time instead of doing ministry right away. One participant was finally blunt enough to say, “I didn’t go to school for seven years not to make any money, have debt, and have to fundraise.”

While it might be accurate to say no one truly enjoys fundraising, millennials seem to have taken this to a new level—it is an entirely unwelcome and strange concept. In contrast, their generation is driven by crowdsourced inventions and is a primary source of backers for all kinds of web-driven and crowdsourced relief work and humanitarian efforts.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, though they are familiar with the idea of raising funds for an innovation or a need, they are concerned about doing it to support themselves as missionaries on the field.

<sup>18</sup> Malcolm, Hadley. USA Today. *Millennials’ ball-and-chain: Student Loan Debt*.  
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2013/06/30/student-loan-debt-economic-effects/2388189>

<sup>19</sup> Crowdsourcing.org. *Why Millennials Are the Ideal Target Market for Crowdfunding*.  
<http://www.crowdsourcing.org/editorial/why-millennials-are-the-ideal-target-market-for-crowdfunding/31988>

## Theme 5: Millennials function as a social tribe, and their values reflect this.

*“Millennials have fewer attachments to traditional political and religious institutions, but they connect to personalized networks of friends, colleagues and affinity groups through social media and digital media.”*

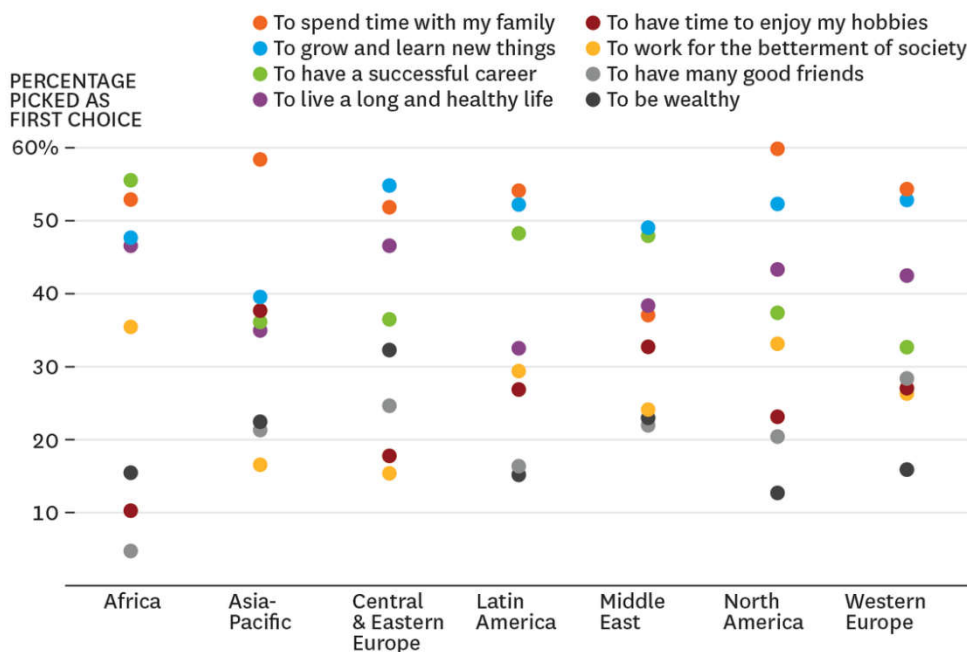
*- Pew Research Center<sup>20</sup>*

Millennials have not abandoned communication altogether; in fact, they are a well-connected, community-driven, relationship-oriented generation. We found that our most successful method of getting millennials to the focus group meetings was to tell them which of their peers were attending, and to ask attendees to invite their friends. As one Atlanta pastor put it, “The question this age group asks about everything is, ‘Who’s going?’” They are willing to do new things, try different places, and meet new people, but they want to be in fellowship and community with one another. Earlier, we discussed how in-person connections are the most valuable method of communication with millennials, but even when it comes to their work-life balance, relationships are paramount to millennials. As evidenced by this infographic, this value is a universal—and is not specific to North American millennials.

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### HOW MILLENNIALS WOULD PRIORITIZE THEIR LIVES

*If you had to prioritize in life, what would you put emphasis on?*



SOURCE “MILLENNIALS: UNDERSTANDING A MISUNDERSTOOD GENERATION”

HBR.ORG

<sup>20</sup> Pew Research Center. *6 New Findings About Millennials*. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/07/6-new-findings-about-millennials/>

<sup>21</sup> Bresman, Henrik. Harvard Business Review. *What Millennials Want From Work, Charted Around the World*. <https://hbr.org/2015/02/what-millennials-want-from-work-charted-across-the-world>



## *Theme 6: Millennials are looking for specific values and practices in the workplace and in organizations they support.*

Authenticity and transparency are key values for millennials, especially in the workplace. (This was brought up even during the meeting with MTW home office millennials.) They need supervisors and teammates who listen, provide instruction, answer questions, are honest, and follow through on their word. When this was discussed at the MTW home office millennial meeting, a specific home office staff person was named as someone who exhibits these qualities. Immediately, the group (consisting of millennials from almost every department) unanimously agreed and responded with how much they respect, value, and enjoy working with this person. “If she doesn’t know, she admits it,” said one participant. “But she promises to find out, and I know that when she says that, she will always do it. She gets the facts and listens, and then goes to find you the answer.”

Millennials crave feedback from supervisors, and those in our focus groups said if they served as missionaries, they would need honest, reliable feedback and mentoring from their team leaders. This goes back to one of the concepts addressed regarding communication—they want leaders to be honest with them because they desire personal development. As one millennial put it in an interview with *Harvard Business Review*, “I would like to move ahead in my career. And to do that, it’s very important to be in touch with my manager, constantly getting coaching and feedback from him so that I can be more efficient and proficient.”<sup>22</sup>

Millennials want a mentoring relationship that is not one-way, where they only receive instruction and recommendations. They have insights that are valuable and want to have a voice. This type of mentoring has come to be known as reverse mentoring. According to Alexia Vernon, president of the leadership development company Catalyst for Action, several factors must be in place for a reverse mentoring relationship to be beneficial:

- **Defined expectations:** Each party must be clear on their expectations.
- **Agreed-upon rules:** Each party must be fully committed to the mentoring relationship and agree upon the rules that will be followed.
- **Willingness to learn:** In a reverse mentoring relationship, both parties act in the capacity of a mentor as well as a mentee, so they must both “genuinely want to learn from and share with the other.”
- **Trust:** Reverse mentoring requires the trust of each party. The goal is to “push one another outside of their comfort zones and try new ways of thinking, working and being.”
- **Transparency:** Both parties must be open with their feelings and with what they are thinking. They must be able to overcome differences in communication style (since different generations communicate differently) and be open to seeing situations from different angles.<sup>23</sup>

Since about 50 percent of MTW’s current leadership is 55 or older, reverse mentoring is essential. “It’s a situation where the old fogies in an organization realize that by the time you’re in your forties and fifties, you’re not in touch with the future the same way as the young twentysomethings,” said Alan Webber, the co-founder of *Fast Company*. “They come with fresh eyes, open minds, and instant links to the technology of our future.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Willyerd, Karie. *Harvard Business Review. Millennials Want to Be Coached at Work.*

<https://hbr.org/2015/02/millennials-want-to-be-coached-at-work>

<sup>23</sup> Quast, Lisa. *Business Insider. Reverse Mentoring: What Is It and Why Is It Beneficial.*

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2011/01/03/reverse-mentoring-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-beneficial/>

<sup>24</sup> Starcevich, Matt M. *What is Unique about Reverse Mentoring.*

<http://www.coachingandmentoring.com/reversementoringresults.htm>

Whether working at their offices or serving on the field, long- or short-term, millennials want to know they are needed and that their work adds value to the team. They want goals and expectations clearly defined, whether during a one-week service trip or as a long-term missionary. They value flexibility, so they are fine if the initial goals change once they get to the field, so long as the change is communicated. Additionally, they need clear goals to better communicate their ministry to donors. As one D.C. participant said, “I want to know what I’m specifically doing. When you say, ‘I’m building relationships,’ no one really knows what that means or what I’m doing.”

One struggle is their desire to have success defined and measured, which can prove difficult on the mission field. They understand their gifts and success are from the Lord, and they desire to use what He has given where there are needs. One question we heard repeatedly about international missions was, “Are you sending me somewhere where there’s a real need?” Using their gifts and skillsets, they want to strive to meet needs, working as a team to further the kingdom together.

Millennials also want the goals and mission of agencies and non-profits to be clear and authentic. This generation is automatically skeptical of organizations and institutions, and this plays out in everything from political affiliation to where they donate money.<sup>25</sup> Our focus groups all mentioned they are wary of whom they support because they do not think all non-profits and NGOs are financially responsible with donations. Many participants mentioned they think non-profits often display a poor use of resources, which discourages them from ever supporting the non-profit. As one Dallas participant said, “Non-profits are a lot about vision and not proper application. It’s there in the word [non-profit]—you’re not profiting. They’re not as clean or clear.”

If a non-profit’s goals and mission are unclear, millennials will find and support another agency that is clear. Their movement away from affiliating with organizations does not indicate the millennials will cease charitable giving; it means non-profits must be authentic and clear while seeking to “create different relationships with, and build different networks among, constituents by gender and age to assure that resources continue to be available to meet society’s pressing challenges.”<sup>26</sup>

### *Theme 7: Millennials have real fears hindering them from pursuing international missions.*

Across the focus groups, millennials named a multitude of fears they have concerning international missions. The general summary was millennials are simply afraid of failing while on the mission field. The groups came to a consensus on the following fears:

1. How will I ever be adequately trained?
2. Will I be stuck in this forever, even if I don’t like it?
3. Will serving internationally kill my future career?
4. Does going internationally mean that I’ve failed here in the United States?
5. Will I be alone?

Millennials are afraid they will not be adequately trained, particularly culturally and spiritually. They are keenly aware of past failures from Americans who have served internationally, and they do not want to make the same mistakes. They desire education and training about the culture and history of international locations. One D.C. participant cited how having this understanding plays into how one would present the gospel and conduct everyday conversations: “What’s the culture’s dominant story to who they are? The U.S. is rights and freedom, but Japan’s is completely different—disappointment and hopelessness. Are you sounding like an off-key instrument from the West because what you’re saying is clashing with their story?”

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<sup>25</sup> Pew Research: Social and Demographic Trends. *Millennials in Adulthood*.

<sup>26</sup> Women’s Philanthropy Institute, Indiana University. *womengive – 14: New Research on Women, Religion and Giving*. [http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/files/research/womengive14\\_final.pdf](http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/files/research/womengive14_final.pdf)

In all our meetings, millennials stated their desire to serve with an agency that provides spiritual nurturing, training, mentoring, personal development, administration, emotional/mental care, care for families, and assistance with support raising.

**35% of millennial respondents cited training and missionary care as important factors in determining which mission agency to serve with.**

*- MTW millennial survey*

While most are not afraid of sharing the gospel, millennials want to do it in a way that resonates and meshes well with another culture's background, both culturally and spiritually. For example, during our travels, we visited multiple seminaries where students are required to take specific courses on other religions such as Islam. Their responses to this requirement was that they hoped it gave them better insight into how to best share the gospel with those who are non-Westerners.

Millennials desire flexibility, and they want to know there is an option to change locations if their goals and skillsets are not well-used in the field. A San Diego participant asked, "Can I use my real calling, or am I going to be made to do something that I don't want to and/or don't have the gifts for?"

Across the board, many millennials are open to working internationally—they just want to take a job and go overseas. They struggle with the concept of being a missionary full-time because it is not clearly defined. Many of them think that even if they served for a year or two, it could hurt them when they return to the U.S. because it would be difficult to explain during job interviews. In the Atlanta group, participants agreed they would pursue agencies that are open and flexible to business as mission, and stated these jobs also provide an immediate and natural way to build relationships with nationals.

When asked about what might prevent him from international service, one Charlotte participant said he did not want to be the stereotypical awkward missionary, saying, "I'd ask myself if I was that weird guy who couldn't make it in ministry in the U.S." This general idea was discussed at all the focus meetings, even though the groups realized it is a stereotype and not always accurate. One Dallas participant said a more truthful portrayal is admitting this is a fear of man and what others might think of him for being a missionary.

Perhaps the most universally addressed fear was that millennials do not want to be alone. They asked, "Who's going with me?" "Can I help recruit my team?" and "How will I know if I'll get along with my teammates?" In the same vein, they want an agency to support them well, adequately train them, make sure their needs (including a decent salary and health insurance) are met, and have a plan for getting them out if things go south. Both single and married millennials worry about leaving their families and want to know how they will have community in a new place. A few of the married millennials, who were mostly without children, expressed they would want to speak with current missionary families to be better prepared for the future.

## *Part 2: Obstacles and hindrances preventing millennials and younger people from serving as international missionaries*

Our research showed several key factors that deter upcoming generations from international missions. Here are some of the major obstacles that have been cited in research and that resonated with the discussions we had with millennials across the country:

**Waiting to decide:** The most apparent reason that millennials hesitate to make a commitment to long-term missionary service is that they want to wait before making any long-term commitment. This is true of jobs, relationships, and social activities. Some might dismiss this as being indecisive, but the truth is the next generations have been brought up with the freedom to make choices and even change them at the last minute. They like the freedom to pick and choose and change as they like.

**Parents:** “The number one barrier these young men and women face in trying to take the gospel overseas is often parents,” writes Kim Ransleben of Desiring God Ministries.<sup>27</sup> Millennials generally have a different relationship with their parents than previous generations. A term commonly used to describe the parents of millennials is “helicopter parents,” because they are actively involved in their children’s lives after college, even in job interviews and in decision making of many types. An even newer term for parents’ role in their child’s life is “snowplow parents.” “The ‘snowplow parent’” reports Emma Waverman, “is defined as a person who constantly forces obstacles out of their kids’ paths. They have their eye on the future success of their child, and anyone or anything that stands in their way has to be removed. . . . They want to remove any pain or difficulties from their children’s paths so that their kids can succeed.”<sup>28</sup> The good side of this is millennials are more likely to respect the opinions of older adults and parents. The negative side of this is that parents hesitate to release them to the unknown, to dangerous situation or to things that would take them too far from home.

**Impact on their career:** Another major hindrance for millennials serving as missionaries is how it will affect their careers. Several voiced that if they work two years as a missionary and then return to find a job in their chosen field, the two years as a missionary will be considered by companies as wasted years that didn’t add to their career development. While they are more willing to serve for short-term stints, they believe that serving for more than a year or two will have adverse effects on their careers.

**Raising support:** As explained earlier, millennials we talked to have great hesitancy about the support-raising process. It can keep them from exploring international missions for longer than a few months.

**Paying off school debt:** School tuition costs have increased 30 to 40 percent over the past 10 years, resulting in higher school debt. Various sources report the average debt of students with a bachelor’s degree is between \$28,400 to \$37,000, and over 70 percent of undergraduate students graduate with debt. For those who decide to go to graduate school (like seminary), the debt figure usually increases with total debt in the \$50,000+ range. These statistics are for all colleges, but often private Christian colleges are more expensive and students graduate with higher debts.<sup>29, 30</sup>

People with \$40,000 to \$60,000 or more in school debt face a difficult situation, even if they desire to serve. They realize repaying loans on their missionary salary will be difficult and long-term at best. Saying to them, “Sell what you have and come follow Christ to the mission field,” is not a sufficient solution. The amount of debt that many college or graduate school students have is not to be overlooked. They ask a good stewardship question: “How can I pay off my school debt on a missionary salary and how long would it take?”<sup>31, 32, 33, 34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ransleben, Kim. Desiring God Ministries. *The Biggest Barrier to Students Going to the Mission Field*. <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-biggest-barrier-to-students-going-to-the-mission-field>

<sup>28</sup> Waverman, Emma. *Snowplow parenting: The latest controversial technique*, *Today’s Parent*, January 14, 2015, <http://www.todayparent.com/blogs/on-our-minds/snowplow-parenting-the-latest-controversial-technique/>

<sup>29</sup> Street, Chriss. *College Graduates Are The New Debt Slaves*. <http://wolfstreet.com/2013/02/06/college-graduates-are-the-new-debt-slaves/>

<sup>30</sup> Simmons-Duffin, Selena. *For Millions Of Millennials: Some College, No Degree, Lots Of Debt*. <http://www.npr.org/2014/11/19/362802610/for-millions-of-millennials-some-college-no-degree-lots-of-debt>

<sup>31</sup> Izzo, Phil. *Congratulations to Class of 2014, Most Indebted Ever*. [blogs.wsj.com/numbers/congratulations-to-class-of-2014-the-most-indebted-ever-1368/](https://blogs.wsj.com/numbers/congratulations-to-class-of-2014-the-most-indebted-ever-1368/);

<sup>32</sup> Kantrowitz, Mark. *Debt at Graduation*. [www.edvisors.com/media/files/student-aid-policy/20140107-debt-at-graduation.pdf](http://www.edvisors.com/media/files/student-aid-policy/20140107-debt-at-graduation.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Clark, Patrick. *Bloomberg Business*. *Debt Is Piling Up Faster for Most Graduate Students – but Not MBAs*. [www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-03-25/student-loan-debt-piles-up-for-graduate-students-but-not-mbas](http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-03-25/student-loan-debt-piles-up-for-graduate-students-but-not-mbas)

**Fears:** Some have called the millennials the fear generation. They so want to succeed and have been told they can and will succeed, that different fears arise about ways they may fail. However, from what we heard and learned in our readings their desire to succeed and be used in God's kingdom work often overrides their fears. When they get involved in a cause they become passionate about it. So, when they are shown how they can serve and are given adequate training and mentoring their fears can be replaced with the desire to serve.

**Poor marketing:** Marketing seriously impacts whether millennials consider missions service at all, or with particular missions agencies. Millennials' interest gravitates toward local missions, so a hindrance to them considering international missions is if the marketing doesn't help them see how their desires and training can be used. This starts with the website and continues with other literature and banners. Comments from meeting participants asked, "Is the website functional?" "Is it visually appealing?" "Can I find what I need?" If they can't get the information easily from the website, they will go to a different organization. Ignorance of the younger generations will lead to poor marketing.

## Conclusion

Challenges lie ahead in mobilizing millennials for missions.<sup>35</sup> The conclusions of this report are not about changing the central call of MTW (to make new disciples and glorify God). Rather, we hope the information will help MTW more meaningfully engage future generations for international missions. For the next generations, this means MTW's message, the means by which we deliver this message, and the opportunities for service must change.

The seven themes of millennials indicate that MTW and churches must address millennials' understanding of the biblical mandate of international missions. This is not just a matter of giving them information, preaching about it or having Bible studies about it. They need to be personally connected to missionaries and international mission work. Mentoring is a necessity for millennials and for the mission agency as well as for a local church. Millennials are confident they can accomplish much, but realize they need more training. Millennials stick together and like to do work and other activities with other millennials. The social tribe aspect of millennials means that you appeal to them as a group more than as individuals. A priority should be to develop new leaders who are millennials and this will attract other millennials. It should be remembered that even though millennials are confident they can accomplish much, they still come with a variety of fears that should be addressed.

The 75 million millennials in the U.S. and especially the approximate 67,000 millennials in the PCA (based on U.S. population statistics) are people that MTW should make great efforts to intentionally and proactively educate and challenge about international missions. MTW cannot take baby steps or merely stand back and observe the upcoming generations—doing so will contribute to this and the next generation's retreat from investigating MTW as a missions agency and from international missions as a whole. It is time to take decisive, active measures toward attracting millennials to international missions service for the sake of Christ's earthly kingdom work.

Soli Deo Gloria

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<sup>34</sup> Zlomek, Erin. Bloomberg Business. *Elite Business Schools Hike Tuition for the Class of 2016*.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-03-17/elite-business-schools-hike-tuition-for-class-of-2016#r=hpt-ls>

<sup>35</sup> One limitation of our research is that college-age millennials were underrepresented. Some 95 percent of our millennial event participants had finished college, along with 80 percent of our online survey respondents. Knowing this, we are actively seeking more input from college students on the survey. We recommend that any future conversations with millennials focus on this age group in particular, to see if their responses differ significantly from post-college millennials.