

**Convergence Vital Worship Grant Project - Gather 2019-2020**  
***Re-imagining Worship & Soulful Community for Rising Generations***  
***Project Conclusions***

**WHAT DO WE HEAR FROM MILLENNIALS AND HOW THEY ARE GATHERING?**

***We Hear...“We are not bound by location when we talk about community.” –***  
*Lindsay Hayes*

Physical attendance at a set time and space is not a good indicator of the level of commitment or involvement of a Millennial. Connection online is considered as big a part of life as in person. Online, participation in a faith community or spiritual practice may include listening to sermons or podcasts, watching church services online or regular involvement in a Bible study or small group through chat rooms. Pastoral care or what could be termed unofficial spiritual direction or confession might happen through chats, or frequently, texts. Community itself is found through online gaming communities, Facebook or Instagram following or even the comments sections of posts.

In person gathering also has increased flexibility. For instance, Millennials are often extremely committed to physical fitness and healthy eating, and the market has made it incredibly easy for people to fit this into their busy lives. They subscribe to kits to make healthy meals, and the ingredients are delivered to their door each week. They belong to gyms that function as accountability and community. However, gym memberships and classes reflect an accommodation to busy schedules. A person may “religiously” go to the gym or even a class but may flex which day of the week and time of day they go. Organizations are providing flexible memberships which make the gym available whenever it fits in *your* schedule to attend.

While Millennials seem willing to work hard and “hustle” for what they feel is of value, it is incumbent upon the service or organization to make what they offer easily and readily available at a variety of times in ways that reflect a shared set of values and leads to a tangible sense that participation is leading to real meaning or transformation in the individual’s life which then radiates out to the larger world.

***To Consider:*** *How might we shift forms of gathering for church to meet our current cultural ethos? What elements might we want to help people resist? How would we do that effectively?*

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## ***We Hear...A desire for hope***

*“People in this demographic who are coming to church are coming because they’ve found hope on a very personal level and they’ve been able to be a part of something which shares that hope with other people.” – Brian Kirby*

*“To the rising generation, materialism says: your value is in your capacity to consume. At their best, religious institutions show us there is more to life than this.”*

*- Something More Report*

There is an intense need for religious organizations (and artists) to address the unrealistic and unsatisfying expectations that we can create our “perfect” life through our own actions and through consumption. This has become the norm in our culture . People are hungry for the transcendent and the hopeful. Millennials long for tools to find a meaningful life and meaningful connections in a world which seems to be ending. They are looking for workable models of how to get along with others and find real, deep connections.

They will not stay around an institution long if they do not see real results in their lives or the lives of others. However, they are committed and passionate when they do.

They sense the need to disconnect from social media and screens in general but there is no road map for how to manage well and discipline this new element of daily life.

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## ***We Hear...A longing for meaningful connection through story & shared work***

*“Hearing someone else’s story will help me learn so much – ‘This was the situation I faced, this is how I trusted God in this situation, and this was the outcome.’ Lindsay Hayes*

While preaching and teaching are still valuable methods of communication, Millennials are embracing new forms of communication. What we heard is not so much that thoughtful teaching should be discarded but that three aspects should be reconsidered. 1. What is the *best* use of time spent in the same physical location? 2. The value of hearing multiple voices

and perspectives and lived experiences on any given topic. 3. The value of simply having a shared experience.

On the first point, We have the invitation to re-think how lecture style teaching is communicated. Some possibilities are using a flipped-classroom model, recorded sermons, e-classes, podcasts, etc. Finding alternative models for communicating information and teachings could free up time spent in person to hear one another's stories, insights, questions, doubts, confessions and encouragement. We also noted that for people with difficulties paying attention or conditioned to constant stimulation, it can be difficult to process lecture style teaching. The opportunity to listen through headphones, use our hands or take a walk while listening can actually *improve* the ability to comprehend and internalize a sermon or teaching.

On the second topic, there is a lack of nuance and understanding of history in contemporary communication. Using story to create context, share perspectives from the Bible, Christians over the course of church history, learning to understand and share our own stories and learning to really listen to the stories of the diverse people around us are really valuable ways churches can spend time together and invite people deeper into the story of God. This is the idea of "doing the homework" together.

The third aspect, is to elevate the value of shared religious and creative experience. To create space to discover, encounter and spend quality time in the presence of the Divine. What does seem to suffer online are what we get out of things like singing together. We miss physical proximity and touch, and the shared ethereal "something" that happens when a group is gathered together in an experience like corporate worship, prayer, silence or the sister experience of live performance and play. The opportunity here is to curate experiences that disrupt the unthinking pattern of daily life and draw us into the transcendent, the playful, the creative and awaken ourselves to that "Something More."

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***We Hear...A need for Compelling invitation and instruction on how and why to live in this way.***

*"If we can begin to say that the habits we do each day actually shape who we are and who we are becoming – there is a lot of hope there – if we take advantage of it." Josh Hayden*

*Successful marketers “Speak to Millennials as friends, offering positive and practical advice through clean and personable website. They encourage an ethos of care for self and others and a mindset of abundance. They argue explicitly or implicitly that each person is a change maker with the opportunity if not the responsibility to make change for the better. And making change means making connection both broadly in the world and deeply at home.” - Something More Report.*

Millennials want to be a part of groups that believe something and that effect positive change. Churches have more of an opportunity to connect with Millennials by focusing on living in the Way of Jesus as opposed to focusing primarily on believing the right doctrines and creeds. They are concerned with the *how*; how does this affect my life, the world? They are looking to “Lifestyle Influencers” on Instagram to tell them how to live, how to pray (meditate), how to govern their lives. How can churches model how to live in the way of Jesus? How to get along with people from differing viewpoints, disconnect from social media, navigate an online culture, connect to real people in real relationship? Ultimately, they are open to whomever can give them real tools for creating a meaningful life and connections.

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### ***We Hear... A cry for help with play, celebration, art and an identity outside of work***

Both *The Art of Gathering* and examples from the *How We Gather* report showed that people need help making time for play, celebration and creating an identity outside of work roles or “productivity.” In each podcast we recorded, the subject of art came up and it’s intrinsic capacity to get beyond barriers and societal norms, creating space for deeper and surprising connection (to each other and to something more). It also became evident that the path to connection with something larger than oneself in our culture often comes through the arts; whether that is a concert experience that lifts us from the everyday or a TV show that gives us a look into someone else’s life and perspective.

Millennials are seeking out structures, instructions and permission to just “be” and to take a break from the “hustle.” This could be an opportunity for churches to “create ground rules” that establish an alternative “world” or space where people are given the freedom through explicit guidelines to explore their creative, play and spiritual sides. Perhaps, an ideal location for exploring their identity as Children of God.

## ***We Hear...A desire for proximity and meaningful relationship – How can we get close to people and have real community?***

*“People knew classical music concerts were happening in their city, it just wasn’t a scene that they were identifying with. Classical music experts don’t really address the need of the audience to have that shared collective experience...[We have to have] the humility to say that we do have a responsibility to make a case for this great art. Those of us who believe it can’t just sit back and say those who don’t appreciate it are missing out and too bad. We need to have the humility to just show up and do what we can do.” Sam Bodkin*

Overwhelmingly, people said that institutional religion, specifically “churches” have a bad “rap.” And, it is incumbent upon those of us who know the benefits and gift of the religious life to be advocates and convince others of this. We cannot expect them to come to us. Whether online, in third spaces or out in our communities and neighborhoods churches have the opportunity to think creatively about the way they are building relationships with rising generations. Certainly buzz-words like “diversity” and “authenticity” come into play but as seen above clarity about who we are, what we do and what difference it makes, along with a willingness to share our stories and *listen* to stories of others would be very welcome.

**To Consider:** *How can we get beyond our walls and routines to get close to rising generations and take advantage of structures within church life that do encourage and cultivate deep, meaningful relationship among all kinds of people?*

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## ***WHAT WE NEED TO CONSIDER ABOUT HOW WE WORSHIP AND GATHER***

### ***Consider...A need for greater clarity***

*“Let purpose be your bouncer.” – Priya Parker*

*“We don’t have to be all things to all people at all times. To be clear about our limitations is*

*also an invitation to get clear about how to be in right relationship with others.”- Erik Martinez Resly.*

How clear are we in what we are trying to do? Is saying, “worshipping God” specific enough? What does it mean to worship God? Is the way we currently come together efficacious in our experience of worshipping God? How easy or difficult is it for others to enter into that experience? Is our goal to help others enter in? To preserve and deepen our own experience of worship? Are the two mutually exclusive? Are we willing to let go of “our way” of doing things to make room for others with different traditions, experiences and needs? Are we asking questions related to how we can do things more prayerfully, more faithfully, more effectively or are we focused on how we prefer it to be?

How can we recognize our strengths and weaknesses and use our specific gifts for ministry instead of trying to copy others? What resonates for us from church tradition and what doesn't? Who specifically are we equipped and called to reach? What part of the Body of Christ are we specifically? Who has God placed in front of us?

The invitation here is to ask really hard questions and be specific. While Church is for everyone – *we* (our expression of church) may not be everyone's cup of tea. On the other hand, we may be a cup of cold water to others walking in the wilderness. *We* may not be equipped to have a large congregation. *We* may need to look at alternative funding models, meeting structures and clarify our definition of church. In order to be the church God has called us to be we need to take inventory of the gifts and passions we have been given and be willing to take a bold stance in our identity so that those who are looking for what God is doing through us can find us. Or so that we might fulfill whatever role God has for us.

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### ***Consider...“Model follows mission” – Erik Martinez Resly***

*Our preference is always to work with folks who are clear about who they are, how they are showing up in this work, how they are working with each other and what they are going to work on.” – Erik Martinez Resly*

In the same way that we need to get clarity on who we serve and gain more specificity in what we are called to do, we need to then ask questions about how we live that out. One big takeaway from the Art of Gathering and from the How We Gather report is that religious institutions most often start with a model before they are crystal clear on a *specific* purpose. Starting with *how* you gather can without a clear sense of *why* can set you up for failure from the beginning.

Once we have clarity on the “why” we need to explore the best way to achieve that way. For instance; is teacher/receiver or project based discipleship a better model? How many people can we serve well? Is this a 15 person ministry or a 500 person ministry? Should we meet once a week or every day? Online or in person? Is a building a help or a hindrance? Etc.

**Consider:** *How can we use our strengths with arts? How can we explore models of other creative groups to think about how we do ministry? Ex. Group Muse; League of Creative Interventionists; The Sanctuaries, podcasts, online classes, etc. to consider our own model?*

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### ***Consider...Measurable and scalable results:***

*“For institutions to work they must become values lead sustainable networks. For idealism to work it must yield measurable and scalable results. For success to work, it must affect some kind of transformation beginning with the inner life of the individual and radiating out to touch the world.” – How We Gather Report*

How are we setting goals and tracking what faithfulness and success look like for us? Are we clear about what we are inviting people into? How do they know they are “in?” In what ways do we expect they will grow? What does commitment and accountability look like? What expectations should they have from us? What does growth look like? What kind of transformation or growth do we expect to see? Is every person clear about this? Are we communicating it clearly to the people we serve?

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### ***Consider...Practices and framework***

*“What enlarges the heart’ is therefore a very important question for monastic formation.” The whole point of monastic lectio is that it creates a culture, a sensibility, a storehouse of images, values - a sensibility. The most important thing about lectio may be its remote effect rather than the immediate experience. **Lectio is not so much about technique as it is about enculturation, it is more a matter of character formation (a total disposition of prayerfulness) rather than special experience.***

*The environment of the monastery - silence, simplicity, order - shapes and enriches the soul. The Benedictine sense of culture, a feeling for aesthetic beauty even in simple circumstances, is an unself-conscious manifestation and cultivation of “soulfulness.” The gentle balance, the irenic*

*quality and sensitivity for human value characteristic of Benedict's followers is a result of a peculiar Benedictine cultivation of the "soul." We are reminded of Saint Paul's "finally, brothers and sisters, let your minds be filled with everything that is upright and pure, everything that we love and admire - with whatever is good and praiseworthy." (Phil. 4-8). The true, The good, the beautiful, the Noble, the worthy of praise - these in large, and Noble the heart, increase our spiritual sensitivity and capacity. " – From Reflection on the Monastic Spiritual Journey, Sr. Donald Corcoran, OSB Cambridge*

**Consider:** *What are the practices, rhythms and frameworks we are committing to and entering into together (Ex. silence, simplicity, proximity, curating, story, art making, gathering). What do we already exhibit and what do we need to cultivate. How do we teach and cultivate these? How do we create a "container" to shape our spiritual lives when we no longer live in the same physical neighborhoods?*

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### ***Consider...Where and how might we gather best?***

***In person:*** How can we better create a sense of "shared experience" with the Taize service or other gatherings?

How can we consider *where* we meet, *how* we meet and *with whom* we meet in an intentional way in order to create the right space for dialogue, deep sharing, prayer, corporate worship, confession, celebration, etc.?

***Online:*** *How can we use the power of the internet to create opportunities for real and deep connection? How might it be used to facilitate the coming together of live people in real time?*

*Are there ways we might use our "online space" for instruction, connection or even something more?*

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### ***What kind of training and preparation do we need to create environments, conversations and actions that are constructive and lead to spiritual deepening?***

- a. Creating environments for deep and meaningful (controversial conversations) – if this is what we are doing.



- b. More training on creating events and gatherings. A deeper exploration of The Art of Gathering. Who need to know which parts and what training do we need to get for ourselves and offer others who work with us to do this well.
- c. Training and research on how to do this online
- d. Training and research or expertise on how to connect and communicate our story with our audience.
- e. Further exploration of creating spaces that shape us.
- f. Further exploration of the ways we can employ the arts to do these things. Study others who do this well.

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***What conclusions or recommendations/patterns do we see?***

“At their best, religious institutions show us that there is more to life than this.” How We Gather Report.

“What would be life-giving at this moment? What can we offer, which would bring people together to hold each other accountable, discern purposeful work, stimulate creativity, participate in mutual growth, change the structures that bind – and full and deeply experience Something More?” – Something More Report