

“Generation : Together” Video User’s Guide

Being the church is about being connected, listening to one another and accepting each other like sisters and brothers. Let’s be the church...together.

How can Christians build connections with others...especially with people from other generations? The “Generation : Together” series was created to help foster meaningful conversations among people of different ages and in various settings. This user’s guide offers ways to put this resource into action in YOUR context!

WHY

It’s no secret that younger generations are leaving the church and have been for years. The secret to attracting or retaining younger church members? There ISN’T one! But a sense of belonging and meaningful relationships with other church members are certainly important to many people who stay.

We wanted to create a tool that congregations could use to help people grow relationships with and understanding of people from other generations (also see *Appendix: Generations*). Our hope is that small or large groups might view these videos together and use them as a jumping-off point for their own conversations.

WHAT

We asked ten people from five different generations and three congregations to share their perspectives about the one faith we share. The result is five videos comprising the “Generation : Together” series:

- Trailer: introductory video, useful for promoting the series. (1:37)
- Volume 1: introduces video interviewees as they discuss perceptions and misconceptions of each other’s Generations. (5:01)
- Volume 2: explores interviewees’ understandings of Church. (10:05)
- Volume 3: interviewees answer questions about Faith. (10:47)
- Volume 4: looks at interviewees’ understandings of Community. (12:24)

WHERE

These videos could be used in a variety of settings. Some ideas:

- Stand-alone, intergenerational event: invite people of multiple generations (older adults, young adults, middle-aged, high schoolers, etc.) to view Volumes 1-4 in a single setting. Include food! (Food’s a good conversation lubricant.)
- Supplement standing events: invite your congregation council, small group, Bible study, men’s or women’s group, staff, youth group, or other congregational setting to begin their regular meeting with a video and discussion, one video each over the next four sessions.
- Congregational meetings: give your congregation something to talk about besides the budget! Start your meeting with a video and time to discuss it with the people sitting around them.
- Cross-generational focus group: if your congregation tends to skew older (or younger), host an event where you intentionally gather people of a younger (or older) generation to join with you. Ask church members to invite non-member friends (or non-participating members) they know of the other demographic, letting them know they’ll be helping your members learn more about them in this focus group. Provide food! Thank your guests!

HOW

Your role as facilitator is to help the group create a space where people feel as comfortable as possible to listen to and share with one another. If participants don't already know each other (or don't know each other well), begin your time together with brief introductions. Invite each person to say their name and also name one thing (not a person) that they care about a lot.

Help set the tone by saying something like this:

This will be an experience of listening for understanding. So often when we listen to others--especially to those whose opinions and experiences differ from our own--we end up listening not for the purpose of understanding but in order to respond, to counter, or to top what we've heard. Let's start our time together now being mindful of this tendency in ourselves and taking pains to listen better. As you hear people in the video and in this room as we talk afterwards, try to listen in such a way that, if you were asked, you'd be able to restate what someone else has shared using your own words. Listening intently is another way to "love your neighbor as yourself".

Try a listening exercise to demonstrate the principle of listening for understanding: ask half of participants to leave the room, out of earshot (across the hall, for instance). Ask the remaining participants to think of a time when they were frightened (or excited), and be prepared to share that story with someone now in the other room after they return. Then go to the group across the hall and tell them that they'll partner-up when they return, and should actively NOT listen to what their partner tells them for the first two minutes. Let them know that you will signal them after two minutes (wave your hands above your head) when it's time to switch to being GOOD listeners. Bring the groups back together, and ask them to pair up. Ask the group who stayed in the room to share their story with their partner (who's secretly, actively NOT listening at first). After two minutes, wave your hands above your head to signal the listeners that they're to switch to being GOOD listeners now. After five minutes, invite the story-tellers to describe what it was like to tell their stories. Invite participants to describe the differences between good listening and bad listening.

Introduce the "Generation : Together" video, then watch together. After watching a video, divide into smaller groups for discussion. Try to make sure the groups are "mixed" with whatever kind of diversity you have. Discussion groups might be as small as three people, or as large as six for maximum effectiveness. Invite discussion by posing one of these sets of questions, as best fits your group:

Set A (appropriate for for any video):

- What did you notice?
- What surprised you?
- What challenged you?
- Which speakers did you relate to the most? Why?
- Which speakers seemed most different from you? How?

Set B (questions similar to those posed to interviewees)

- *Volume 1: Generations*
 - What generation do you identify with and why? (See *Appendix: Generations* for more information about generational labels.)
 - How do you think members of other generations view your generation?
 - What fears or concerns do you think other generations have about the church?
 - What fears or concerns do you think your generation has about the church?

- *Volume 2: Church*
 - What do you think is the primary role of the church?
 - Do you think it's important or not to be a church member? Why?
 - Why did you choose the congregation you're a part of now? (Or, why don't you belong to a congregation?)
 - Video interviewees were all Lutheran church members. Does a congregation's denomination matter to you? Why or why not?
 - What makes Church special/distinctive from other organizations?
- *Volume 3: Faith*
 - When did faith become important to you?
 - How would you describe your faith? What IS faith?
 - Without _____ my faith is kinda pointless.
 - What else do you have faith in?
- *Volume 4: Community*
 - Video interviewees talk about "community" both in terms of the community in their own congregation and the local community around them. Which sense of "community" seems more important for a church to be concerned about?
 - How connected is your congregation to your local community?
 - How important is the quality/character/health of a faith community to you? Why?
 - What makes for good community?
 - What gets in the way of fostering a strong sense of community?

If you have time, reconvene discussion groups as one large group and invite people to share the highlights from their discussions. If appropriate, invite someone to close with prayer.

NEXT

We hope that the process of listening to and discussing important questions about faith helps to build relationships among people in your community. If your congregation wants to connect better with young adults, for instance, invite some young adults you know to join you in these video discussions. Listen to what they have to say. Eat together. Hang out. You might find, at the end of your time together, there's energy around doing something ELSE together! (How about that!)

So if your intergenerational group enjoys this conversation, you might suggest getting together again for another purpose, like tackling a short-term service project (maybe staffing a soup kitchen together for a meal). Or try a short-term Bible study together, maybe one that looks at the early church (Acts or 1 Corinthians would be good). Or start smaller...invite someone not your age to join you for coffee or lunch and learn more about each other. Building connections happens when people step out and open up; we hope this tool leads you to do just that!

AFTER

We're thankful for a grant that made this project possible, and we'd like to report back to our grantor about how it's being used. If you found this tool useful (or not), we'd like to hear how you used it. [Please click here](#) to find our anonymous, simple, 3-question feedback form (or type in this address: <https://goo.gl/forms/0Q3oKUhl778QcbZR2>). We're grateful for your partnership, and wish you well as you live out your faith...together!

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APPENDIX: GENERATIONS

Demographers use different criteria to determine when there is a generational cohort with similar characteristics. It may be a historical event, a date, or a cultural shift that demarks the end of one generation and the start of another. Over time, cultural observers tend to come to general consensus about the parameters around generations, and a popularly-used name starts to stick. Hence the names for the five generations represented in these videos: Generation Z, Millennial Generation, Generation X, Boomer Generation, and Builder Generation.

There is never uniformity across an entire generation, and often people identify more with the supposed characteristics of a generation other than the one in which they were born. Nevertheless, you can find many “think pieces” about each of these generations and how members of them tend to think and act. Pew Research Center (<http://www.pewforum.org>) is one source for facts-based research about generational differences.

Here’s a simple chart showing commonly accepted parameters for these generations:

Generation	Birth years (vary)	Notes
Generation Z (a.k.a. iGeneration or iGen)	After 2001	Name not yet definitive, nor are the parameters separating it from Millennial generation
Millennials (a.k.a. Generation Y)	1981-1996	Oldest of this generation graduated high school in 2000, the new millennium
GenX	1965-1980	Named after a novel by Douglas Coupland after rejecting Baby Buster name given them by Boomers
Baby Boomers	1946-1964	Post-war birth spike ended with wide availability of birth control pill
Builders (a.k.a. Silents)	1928-1945	Children during Great Depression and WWII