

Fr. James J. Bacik Lecture Series
Bridging the Generational Divide: Christian Perspectives
Thursday, July 11, 2019

Introduction

1. Need for dialogue between the younger generations influenced by the digital culture and older generations who remember the benefits of conversation.
 2. Sociological studies and the 2019 Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis: "Christ is Alive" (*Christus Vivit*) offer helpful perspectives and advice.
 3. Some helpful reading: *Reclaiming Conversation*, 2015 by Sherry Turkle.
- I. Generations in General
- A. Various generations (Pew Research dates)
 1. Silent generation – born before 1945
 2. Baby boomers - born between 1946 to 1964
 3. Generation X - born between 1965 to 1980
 4. Millennials - born between 1981 to 1996
 5. Generation Z - born 1997 to today
 - B. Common Characteristics
 1. All human beings have infinite longings and finite capabilities; are interdependent social creatures who need community to flourish; are oriented to mystery; struggle to find identity; fall in love; grieve the loss of loved ones; are called to do meaningful work and find time for leisure; have to decide at least implicitly whether life has meaning or is absurd.
 2. Common elements as U.S. citizens: living in the most affluent country in the history of the world with all of its modern conveniences and temptations such as consumerism, individualism, hedonism, sexism, racism and xenophobia.
- II. Millennials (*cf* Pew Research)
- A. Definition
 1. Pew defines them as born 1981-1996 meaning they are now 23 to 38 years old.
 2. Most have memories of 9/11/2001 terrorist attack; lived during wars in Iraq and Afghanistan which sharpened political polarization; some participated in the 2008 election of the first black president; the Great Recession of 2008 slowed their advancement into social and economic adulthood; came of age in the age of social media (iPhone launched in 2007); connected to the web through mobile devices.
 3. It is too soon to make competent generalizations about Gen Z which grew up in an "always on" technological environment although some preliminary research suggests "dramatic shifts" in behavior, attitudes and lifestyles.

B. Demographics

1. Pew projections: in 2019, Millennials will surpass Baby Boomers as largest cohort; 73 million to 72 million Boomers.
2. Young immigrants add to Millennial population.
3. Over 40% non-white, Silents - 79% white.

C. Broad Generalizations

1. Better educated.
2. Women more likely to participate in nation's workforce (also Gen Y women).
3. More racial and ethnic diversity.
4. Delaying marriage longer and fewer getting married.
5. Living longer at home with parents.
6. Somewhat slower in establishing own household.

D. Education

1. 39% of older Millennials have a bachelors' degree or higher compared to 15% of Silents, 25% Boomers and 24% Gen X.
2. Women Millennials have made big gains, 43% bachelor's degree compared to 11% Silents. They are getting college degrees at a higher rate than millennial men as did Gen X women (3% more).

E. Employment: despite a reputation for job hopping, millennial workers stay at their jobs at about the same rate as Gen Xers.

F. Income and Wealth

1. Harder hit by Great Recession.
2. Individual earning for young adults has been mostly flat over last 50 years.
3. Household wealth slightly less for Millennials than older generations at same age.
4. College educated Millennials have median annual earnings of \$56,000 in 2018 about the same as Gen X at same age.
5. Millennials without a college degree had slightly lower annual income than previous generations: \$36,000 compared to almost \$39,000 for Gen Xers.
6. Millennials have slightly less household wealth than Boomers at same age.

G. Housing

1. In 2018, about 15% of Millennials (ages 25-37) were living in their parent's home, double that of Boomers and Silents at same age and 6% higher than Gen Xers.
2. Those without college were twice as likely to still be at home as those with a college degree, a much bigger gap than previous generations. Once again education makes a difference.

H. Family

1. 46% of ages 25 to 37 are married, a big drop from 83% of Silents married in 1968.

2. Today the typical man marries at 30 and women at 28. In 1968 that was men 23 and women 21.

3. Again, education makes a difference: 40% of Millennials without college are married and 53% of those with at least a bachelors are married. In 2016 48% of Millennial women (ages 20 to 35 at the time were mothers). When Gen X women were the same age in 2000, 57% were already mothers.

I. Voting and Politics

1. In the 2016 election, 51% of eligible Millennials voted compared to 70% of Silents and 69% of Boomers and 63% of Gen Xers.

2. Among registered voters 59% of Millennials affiliate with the Democratic Party or lean Democratic compared to 48% of Boomers and Gen Xers.

3. After 1st year of Trump presidency, 27% approved and 65% disapproved compared to Gen Xers at 36% and 57%.

J. Religion – Gallup Polls in 2018

1. In general there is a long term decline in the importance of religion in American lives. In 1952, about 75% said it was very important and in 2015 only 49% said it was very important; 78% say religion is losing its influence.

2. There has been a general decline in church membership, down among Catholics from 76% in late 90s to 63% today.

3. Millennials: about 68% identified with a religion in 2018. In early 2019 33% say they have no religious affiliation and only 57% of religious Millennials belong to a church.

4. Twenty years ago 76% of Catholics belonged to a church and in 2018, 63%.

5. A 2015 Pew Study: 35% of adult Millennials are unaffiliated compared to 17% of Baby Boomers. Generational cohorts typically do not get more religious as they grow older.

6. Some 72% of “nones” say they believe in some higher power.

7. About 83% of Millennial adults say they believe in God or some higher power compared to 67% of those 50 to 64.

8. They believe in an afterlife and pray every day at about the same rate as older generations.

III. Generation Z

A. Demographics

1. Those born in 1997 and after – now the oldest are 21 and younger.

2. Will be the largest cohort – by 2020 they will be 40% of all consumers.

B. Influences

1. Nearly 75% of teens today have access to a phone and 24% go on-line “almost constantly” and have access to Twitter accounts; first generation to grow up with social media readily available at young age. They use social media to stay in touch with family and friends; they care about what others think of their postings; they use social media to deal with loneliness, anxiety and fragility; girls are more likely to be affected by negative comments than

boys and were more likely the object of cyberbullying which is now more common among Gen Zers than Millennials.

2. No memories of 9/11/2001.
3. Saw parents struggle through the Great Recession from 2007 to 2009 (19 months).

C. Education

1. 81% say obtaining a college degree is necessary to achieve career goals.
2. Primary concern is paying for college without a large debt that prompts some to study hard to get a scholarship, to show interest in ROTC programs and to look for parents financial help. Still 58% say benefits of college outweigh the cost. Some use social media to establish businesses at young age (different from a lemonade stand).

D. Political Views – too early to tell

1. In straw poll of 83,000 high school students in 2016, 32% for Trump, 22% Clinton and 31% choosing not to vote.

E. Employment Opportunities

1. Some claim they want jobs that are fulfilling and socially meaningful.
2. Some claim they are prepared for a global business environment.
3. A *New York Times* article claiming they actually prefer face-to-face encounters at the worksite over online interactions - an argument disputed by others.

IV. *Reclaiming Conversation* by Sherry Turkle

A. Concerns

1. Younger generations have grown up without having experienced uninterrupted conversations. Apple unveiled the smart phone in 2007 which sold 11.6 million by 2008; by 2013, 84% of Americans used their phone regularly.
2. Story: a 37 year old father goes on a fieldtrip with his 7 year old, but spends his time texting others about it and showing pictures while saying little directly to his daughter.
3. The phone promises that we will always be heard; we can put our attention on what we want; we will never be alone; we will never be bored.
4. College students crave constant connection; 90% admit texting during class.
5. Reliance on a phone prevents boredom which in previous generations was a catalyst for imagination and creativity.
6. More time is spent impressing others than in self-reflection; instant feedback replaces self-criticism.
7. Young workers falsely think they are more effective by multitasking.
8. In romantic relationships, texting is seen as a way of putting best self forward but it misses nuances available in face-to-face encounters.
9. Even the presence of a phone during conversation is distracting.
10. Studies show current collegians are 40% less empathetic than previous generations.
11. Mobile devices allow us to step out of where we are to be where we would like to be with no social stigma.

12. People report using phones during boring parts of funerals.
13. Many older citizens have lost confidence in their ability to mentor youth, the first generation to know more about something important than their parents.
14. The crawler under news on TV began in 1981 during Iran hostage crisis; it divides our attention.

B. Analysis

1. It is through conversation that we learn to listen, develop empathy, experience the joy of being heard, and increases self-reflection, develop capacity for intimacy and friendship.
2. Students have more connections but fewer good friends; silence makes them anxious, although some like silence on retreats.
3. The essential problem is the “flight from conversation,” a “voyage of forgetting.”
4. Texting allows us to answer when we want and to edit our response; conversation is more demanding and can be scary.
5. Technology is here to stay and will become more available and efficient. The challenge is to know how to use it well.
6. Social media has created the fear of missing out (known as FOMO) because it is possible to know where others are having fun.
7. Young persons generally prefer texting to talking on the phone.
8. In the digital culture, friends can be used, individuals can be self-centered, and anonymous and aggressive attacks are common.
9. Eye contact is important for developing empathy.
10. Young people learn by “grazing,” gathering bits of information from the Internet, which often misses the narrative context; they take class notes like a stenographer does. On-line courses meet a real need but they often lack real interaction with people.
11. Multitasking is not more efficient and productive contrary to popular opinion.
12. Businesses that promote face-to-face conversation are more productive; some find stand-up meetings effective (no phones).
13. The digital culture conditions us to see the world as a series of crises calling for immediate action without taking time to analyze causes, possible solutions, etc.
14. Right now there are more people on Facebook than there were on the planet two hundred years ago.
15. Social media drives people to develop a “fretful self” always ready in emergencies to connect with family and friends.
16. Contemporary tyranny does not use force but removes awareness of other possibilities (Allen Bloom).
17. Social media can influence voting participation and choices.
18. It is dangerous that technology companies like Google know so much about us.

19. A study of children who put aside their phones for five days at camp recover some of their capacity for empathy.
 20. Robots, caring machines, empathy apps are no substitutes for face-to-face encounters.
- C. Advice
1. Have young people spend time together without their phones on retreats, summer camps. Studies suggest empathy levels increase.
 2. Older generations who know the value of face-to-face encounters can find ways to promote personal conversations among youth.
 3. No phones at shared meals.
 4. Create sacred space at home and at work.
 5. Turn the phone off and cultivate solitude, the ability to be comfortably alone, which is necessary for personal development.
 6. Young children should go to bed without their phone which enables them to go within to deal with boredom.
 7. Talking to a confidant, spiritual director, counselor can promote deeper self-understanding as we hear ourselves talk.
 8. Cultivate family conversations that help develop empathy, give sense that there is a safe place to share feelings, talking things out is better than acting out, promotes authenticity.
 9. Read to children and do not interrupt to take a call.
 10. Create device free times and places in the home.
 11. Ban devices in the classroom to promote note-taking or use computers creatively.
 12. Have more face-to-face meetings at work with no devices.
 13. Help youngsters and older generations to be comfortable with solitude.
 14. Give time for meditation at work.
 15. Turkle has a section (p 319ff) on guideposts: Put away your phone when it is distracting; Slow down and have more inner conversations; Develop our creativity; Create sacred space for conversations; Concentrate on “uni-tasking”; Talk to people who have different viewpoints; Give conversations at least 7 minutes to develop; See the value of difficult conversations: Recognize the things technology does well (finding useful information on the Internet) and what it inhibits (developing empathy); Reflect on whether technology is helping or hurting our personal development; Remember the value of good conversations, shared solitude, productive silence; Do not avoid difficult conversations; Avoid all or nothing thinking fostered by digital binary choices; See nuance, complexity;
 16. Adults should stay confidant we know things from experiences about life (conversation, encounters, learning, etc.) that can benefit younger generations.

V. Christ is Alive (*Christus Vivit*)

A. Perspectives

1. Jesus: seeking independence at age 12; lived an ordinary life in Nazareth; preached publicly in his early thirties and died around 36 years old; the risen Christ shares the Holy Spirit that keeps the Church young and invites young people to share in his mission.
2. Mary of Nazareth was probably around 13 when she said yes to God.
3. Hebrew Scriptures: David was the youngest son.
4. Young Saints: Therese the Little Flower died in her late twenties and is a Doctor of the Church.
5. Youth is a state of mind (n 34); is very diverse and has meaning in itself (n 135).
6. More young persons have tuned out the Church because of scandals, ineffective clergy, poor homilies, inadequate explanations of the faith, not giving them active roles, patriarchal outlooks, defensive attitudes (n 40-43).
7. Influences: advertising teaches them to be perpetually dissatisfied (n 78); globalization leaves some without family traditions (80); exaltation of sex and manipulation of the body.
8. Digital Environment (86-90) affects much of life including the way we relate and how we learn; positively it facilitates exchange, gives access to information; can publicize human rights violations; promote active citizenship; helps Church reach young people. Negatively, can be manipulative; fosters loneliness; retards authentic relationships; fosters cyber bullying; spread pornography and facilitates gambling addiction, fosters tribalism that avoids communication with others who think differently, can spread false information and influence the democratic process, ruin reputations; can blind us to the vulnerability of others and retard self-reflection; can create a “delusional parallel reality” that involves withdrawal from the real world of family, culture and religion; a “digital migration.” Young people have to effect a synthesis of what is personal and cultural and what is global, from what is “virtual contact to good and healthy communication” (n 90).
9. Keep these truths in mind: God loves you for you and the work of his hands, rest in his embrace; Christ saves you and his love is greater than all your problems; Christ is alive, you can relate to him as a friend; stay open to the Holy Spirit who gives you joy and passion for a life of service (n 112-133).
10. “The world has never benefited nor will it ever benefit from a rupture between generations” (n 191). We all need a “collective memory” that provides a frame of reference for establishing a new society.
11. Many young people today feel “uprooted,” surrounded by failed dreams, betrayed by injustice and social violence, collapse of fundamental certainties fostered by media outlets producing a sense of orphanhood (n 216).
12. We are all called to holiness, to be a friend of Christ, to be part of God’s love story; to live a life of service to others – our true calling.
13. We are all called to practice Christian discernment that enables us to learn and follow God’s will. This requires silence and the practice of prudence. We must listen to God to discern our vocation in life and also listen to reality and other people; most of all we need to move beyond asking “Who am I?” and emphasize

“For whom am I?” Our vocation is to follow Christ our friend, helping others discern requires sensitivity to the uniqueness of the person, their thinking and emotions, and to what they want to be, their ultimate intention that provides meaning. We should accompany young persons and not impose our own road map(n 278-299).

B. Advice by Pope Francis to Youth (ages 16-29 – Millennials and Gen Zers)

1. Those in developed countries should avoid xenophobia and welcome refugees and migrants.
2. Be inspired by good priests and encourage those who seem at risk, keep dreaming about how the Church can be a better sign of Christ, help liberate us from clericalism - the fertile ground for sex abuse.
3. Do not let social media addict you to consumerism but maintain your own authentic self. Francis quotes venerable Carlo Acutis (1991-2006), to the effect that you are born an original, do not end up dying as a photocopy (n 106).
4. Live your youth fully, spend your energy on good things, live each moment filling it to the brim with love, trust and Jesus your friend (n 147-157).
5. Strive for spiritual growth; youth has an enduring value but is also a preparation for adulthood; find your own path to holiness; seek the joy of “fraternal communion;” build “social friendship” that seeks the common good by working for justice and peace; get involved and build a better world by offering a Christian response to social and political problems; be ready to speak about Jesus in every area of life; “You are the now of God” use your energy, idealism, creativity to change the world, do not wait till tomorrow (158-178).
6. Reject a cult of the youthful body and see beauty in older couples and dedicated servants appreciate your traditional roots in family and culture while using creativity to make a better world; attend to your elders; learn from their experiences.
7. Listen to the stories of your elders, even the legendary and fanciful, for hidden wisdom.
8. See the desire to form a family as your vocation and the passion of sex as a marvelous gift from God to share love and generate new life. Reject cultural notion that commitment is out of fashion and limits options and opt for marriage where you can grow in self-knowledge, virtue and love for one another (259-266).
9. The single life provides its own possibilities for living the baptismal vocation to holiness and service (267).
10. See work as not merely a way to make money but as an expression of human dignity, a means of personal growth, a stimulus to grow in responsibility and creativity, a protection against individualism and a way to glorify God (268-273).
11. Consider a possible vocation to the priesthood or religious life (274-277).

C. Advice to Older Generations

1. Listen to young persons and learn from them (n 38).
2. Be “memory keepers,” form a permanent choir providing prayer for those fearing the challenges of life; tell young people that anxiety about the future can be overcome, that there is more joy in giving than receiving, that love must be shown in action as well as words (196-7).
3. Do not pine for supposed glories of the past but work with youth to sanctify the present and create a better future without telling them how they should think and act (198-201).
4. Do not preach to youth but approach them with the “grammar of love” (211); allow them to play a major role in planning their own programs.

D. Role of Church in Bridging the Divide

1. Help create a welcoming, forgiving home where in a relaxed setting youth can meet, have fun and pray together.
2. Schools must be open to service programs and improved approaches that promote experiences of the essential Gospel message (*Kerygma*) and a “culture of encounter” especially with the most vulnerable. Catholic schools must provide a good education that includes enduring wisdom and the meaning of life and not just bits of knowledge for private success (221-223).
3. Foster a liturgical piety centered on the Eucharist and major feasts and a contemplative piety (adoration of Blessed Sacrament which has grown in popularity) (n 224).
4. Christian service projects enable young people to live the Gospel and appropriate the social teachings of the Church (n 225).
5. Church should use music (the everyday context of youth culture) to enhance liturgical participation and help shape identity and arouse emotion. The Church should overcome the problematic aspects of sports (commercialism and ideology of win at any cost) and promote the joy of participating. Help youth appreciate nature and care for the environment (n 226-229).
6. Church should stay open to “popular youth ministry,” fewer rules, more open to the Spirit inclusive of those on the margins of faith and struggling like the fleeing Emmaus disciples. Pilgrimages can enrich participants (n230 -238).
7. Encourage young people to be missionaries in their own settings (239-241).
8. Accompany them on their journey; motivate, encourage and challenge them and do not demand of them a perfection beyond their years. They want mentors who are faithful Christians, seeking holiness, confident without judging, active listeners, and especially know they are forgiven sinners, human beings who make mistakes (246-7).

