



Attracting & Retaining Younger Members

Best Practices

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Learning Objectives

1. Different approaches for different generations
2. What we need to know about younger generations & Church
3. What to do (and not to do) about liturgy, design, pledges, and methods of giving

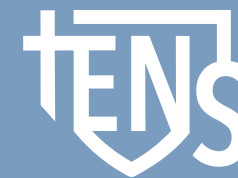
Introduction



Generational Differences impact Donor Motivation

How you message to different generations matters

- ▶ Let's take a look at how generational demographics impact donations in your community



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Different Generations = Different Approaches

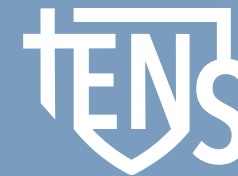
The “Matures”

- ▶ Born before 1945
- ▶ Most interested in
 - ▶ Institutional support – they trust the institution
 - ▶ Pastoral care
 - ▶ The Church “being there” for them and future generations
 - ▶ Planned, Capital, and Annual Giving

From the Lake Institute of Faith & Giving, 2024

Different Generations = Different Approaches

MATURES
1945 & EARLIER



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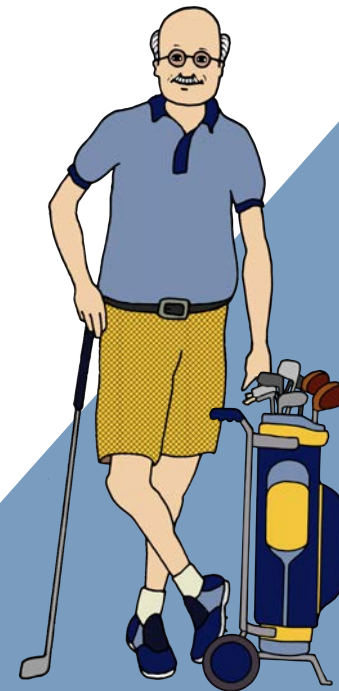
The “Baby Boomers”

- ▶ Born 1946 - 1964
- ▶ Most interested in
 - ▶ Wanting to know the finances before they decide to donate
 - ▶ The Church “being there” for them and future generations
 - ▶ Planned, Capital, and Annual Giving
- ▶ This is the wealthiest generation ever to have lived

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Different Generations = Different Approaches

BABY BOOMER
1946-1964



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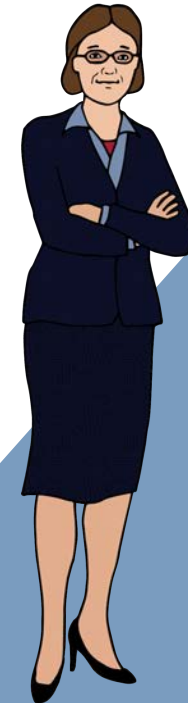
Generation X – The Lost Generation

- ▶ Born 1965 - 1976
- ▶ Most interested in
 - ▶ Far more interested in volunteering than donating to their church – or see volunteering as a first step
 - ▶ Less trusting of the institution, more interested in the work
 - ▶ Annual and Capital Giving
- ▶ This generation will inherit +\$40 Trillion in the next 15 years

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GENERATION X
1965-1976



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The Millennials

- ▶ Born 1977 - 1995
- ▶ Most interested in
 - ▶ Results – what is the church doing in the community and why does it matter?
 - ▶ Even less trust in organization and institution, more interested in donating to grassroots or defined ministries than to overall budgets
 - ▶ Largest online donors
- ▶ 89% of this generation donates to nonprofits, they are very generous

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MILLENNIAL
1977-1995



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Generation Z

- ▶ Born 1996 +
- ▶ By 20 years old 30% have made a donation to a nonprofit
- ▶ 97% of this generation has made an online gift for a charitable purpose
- ▶ Most interested in
 - ▶ They want their work to make a difference, therefore their church needs to prove the same
 - ▶ 76% are worried about the planet, and want to see their faith communities do something about it
 - ▶ Prefer apps and mobile giving. They don't write checks
 - ▶ Least likely to pledge, but will give when asked
- ▶ This group makes up 40% of all customers – they have buying power, and they're using it

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Different Generations = Different Approaches

GENERATION Z
1996 & LATER



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Preparing for Younger Members

The picture is complex – and that’s actually good news.

Among those who attend: Gen Z leads in frequency

Gen Z churchgoers now average 1.9 services/month – the highest rate of any adult generation, nearly double their 2020 frequency. (Barna / Gloom, *State of the Church*, Sept. 2025)

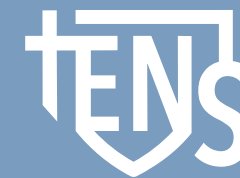
But overall affiliation continues to decline

Only 45% of 18–29-year-olds identify as Christian; 44% claim no religious affiliation. (Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study*, Feb. 2025)

The decline has stabilized – a hopeful sign

The share of Americans with no religious affiliation has plateaued at ~30% after decades of growth – a striking pause in a long decline. (Pew Research Center, Dec. 2025)

The door is open – our job is to walk through it with them.

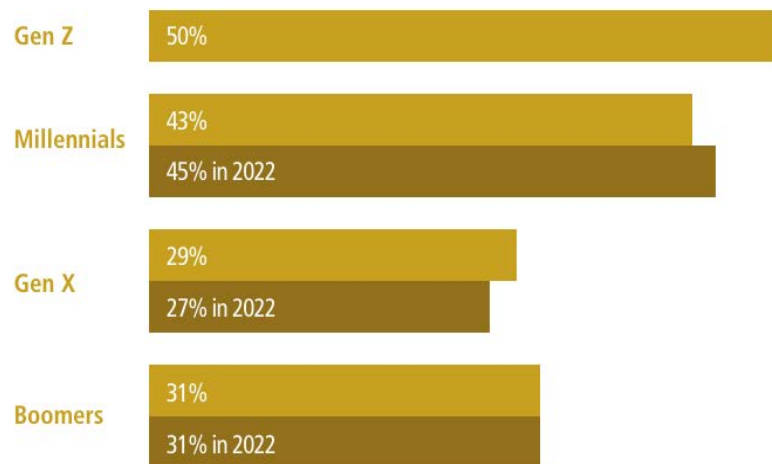


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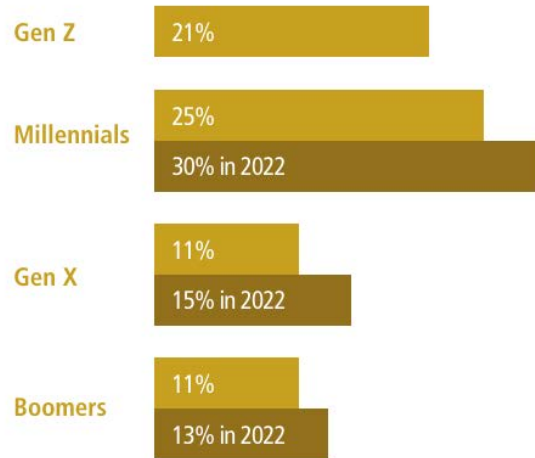
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Preparing for Younger Members

THOSE WHO SAY THEY ATTEND IN PERSON ALMOST EVERY WEEK OR EVERY WEEK



THOSE WHO SAY THEY ATTEND VIRTUAL SERVICES ALMOST EVERY WEEK OR EVERY WEEK

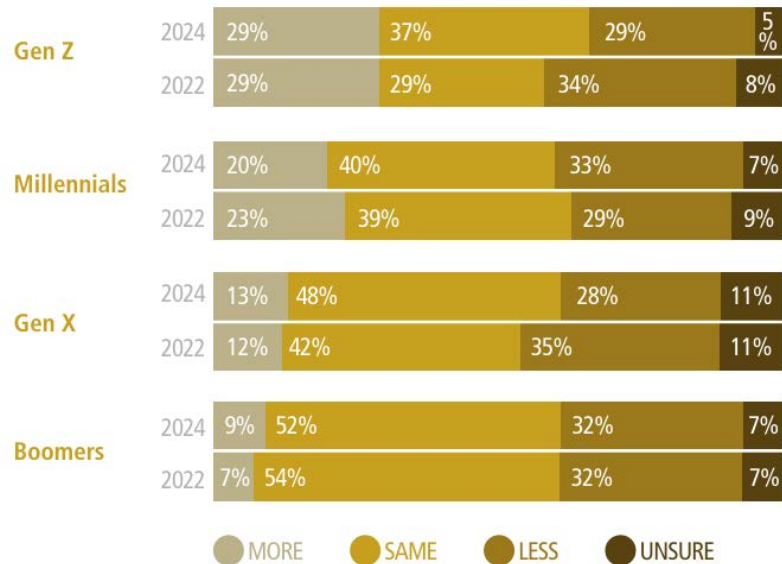


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Source: Giving USA 2025

Preparing for Younger Members

LIKELIHOOD TO SUPPORT PLACES OF WORSHIP IN THE COMING YEAR



Source: Giving USA 2025

Attracting Younger Donors



Strategies to Adopt to make our Church ready for Younger Members

In order to encourage Millennials and Generation Z to become donors, the Church needs to adopt and adapt. We will explore these in the following slides.

1. How we engage the wider community
2. How we increase volunteer engagement
3. How we expect to raise funds
4. How we make disciples



Show Them Results

- ▶ Gen Xers and Millennials are not motivated to give to simply maintain the status quo.
- ▶ They want to see results. They want to know how their sacrifice (and at this age and income experience, giving is sacrificial) is making a difference.
- ▶ **Make a concerted effort to help people see how their giving is having an impact.**



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Preach Sermons that are Honest

- ▶ Young members are hungry for thoughtful, provocative engagement on the Gospel and age-old questions
 - ▶ Engaging science and climate science
 - ▶ Honest conversations about health and wellness
- ▶ Engage the News
 - ▶ Respond rather than react to today's headlines
 - ▶ Relate today to the Gospel, to our lives
- ▶ Healthy, Whole Relationships
 - ▶ Preach about relationship values that are in line with the culture. Model reality, not morality



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Address the Mental Health Crisis

Gen Z is the most anxious generation on record

- ▶ 39% of Gen Z frequently feel uncertain about the future; an equal number report frequent anxiety. (Barna, Gen Z & Mental Health, 2024)
- ▶ 42% of Gen Z say mental health challenges are a key reason they are looking to faith – making the church’s response a direct evangelism opportunity. (Barna, 2026 State of the Church)

Faith and wellbeing are genuinely linked

- ▶ Young people with deep, engaged Christian faith consistently report fewer struggles with emotional wellbeing than their peers. (Barna, 2024)

What this means for us

- ▶ Name anxiety, loneliness, and depression from the pulpit – without shame. Partner with counselors. The church can be the one place that holds both the wound and the hope.

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Acknowledge Economic Reality

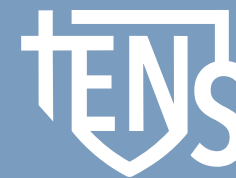
Giving is sacrificial – more than ever

- ▶ Home prices have surged 60% since 2019; apartment rents are up 29% since 2020, while incomes grew only ~22%. The affordability gap has never been wider for young adults. (YIP Institute, 2025)
- ▶ Only 27% of Gen Z own their home – tracking well behind prior generations at the same age. The annual income needed to afford a median home is now \$126,670. (Redfin / Harvard, 2025)

What this means for us

- ▶ When we ask younger members to pledge, acknowledge the weight of that ask. Frame generosity as spiritual discipline, not transaction. Honor every gift at every level.
- ▶ Consider ministries that meet real needs: financial literacy, housing resources, community support. These are discipleship, not just social services.

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Pledging might not be normal... and that's ok!

- ▶ Younger members may see pledge forms as “debt contracts.” Is this the message we want to send?
- ▶ Help treasurers and bookkeepers count patterns as pledges: someone who gives frequently is reliable and predictable whether they sign a form or not
- ▶ Post-colonialism, post-patriarchy, post-capitalism realities can make pledging feel tone deaf and out of sync



Engage the AI Moment

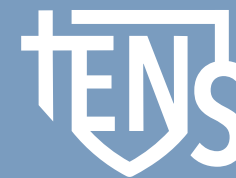
AI is already in the spiritual conversation

- ▶ Nearly 1 in 3 U.S. adults now say they trust spiritual advice from AI as much as from a pastor. Among Gen Z and Millennials, that figure rises to 2 in 5. (Barna, 2026 State of the Church)
- ▶ This is not a threat to resist – it is a mirror. If young people turn to AI for meaning, the church must ask: what are we not offering that they are seeking there?

What this means for us

- ▶ Preach and teach about AI honestly: its promise, its limits, and the difference between information and wisdom. Gen Z navigates an AI-saturated world – they need guides, not gatekeepers.
- ▶ Use AI as a pastoral tool, not a replacement. Sermon research, accessibility, outreach – these can all be enhanced. But presence, relationship, and sacrament cannot be automated.

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Make Church like ... Church!

- ▶ Barna research finds younger worshipers prefer sanctuaries over auditoriums (77%), and “classic” over “trendy” settings (67%) – yet describe their ideal church as casual and relaxed. Authenticity, not aesthetics, is the goal. (Barna, Making Space for Millennials)
- ▶ Medium-sized, in-person, community-centered spaces remain the sweet spot. Gen Z craves presence over production – the 2023 Asbury Revival, which packed a historic 1929 auditorium, proved it.



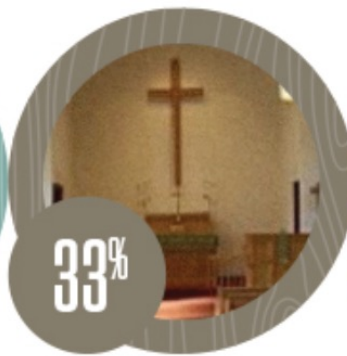
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Make Church like ... Church!

▶ SELECT THE **ALTAR** IMAGE THAT IS MOST APPEALING TO YOU ◀



All Millennials	19%
Churched	17%
Marginally Churched	18%
Unchurched	21%



All Millennials	33%
Churched	37%
Marginally Churched	32%
Unchurched	31%



All Millennials	37%
Churched	34%
Marginally Churched	41%
Unchurched	38%



All Millennials	11%
Churched	13%
Marginally Churched	8%
Unchurched	11%

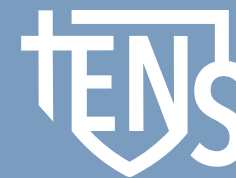
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Get Good on Tech

- ▶ Go where Gen Z is: TikTok and YouTube Shorts for short-form video, Instagram for community, and podcast/sermon series for on-demand listeners. Engagement beats broadcasting.
- ▶ Post questions, not announcements. Social media is a dialogue – ask about faith, doubts, the week's Gospel. Gen Z engages with authenticity far more than polished production.
- ▶ Don't abandon bulletins and hymnals unless your tech team is truly ready. A failed screen transition disrupts worship far more than a printed order of service.



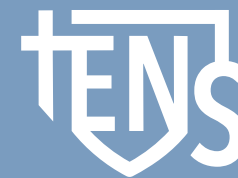
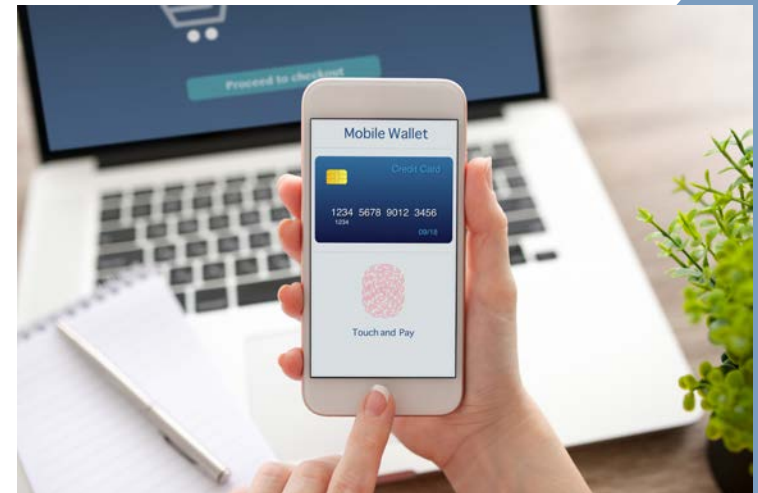
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Focus on Retention

- ▶ The number one goal is helping people understand the importance of regular consistent giving.
- ▶ This means **encouraging them to see the value of generosity as a discipline.**
- ▶ It also means using digital giving solutions as a way to promote recurring giving as an option.



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Encourage Volunteerism

- ▶ The key to encouraging generosity among these generations is **emotional involvement**.
- ▶ They are much quicker to give when they're invested in the cause and work.
- ▶ By making volunteerism an organizational priority, you're making it easier for people to give.



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Don't Forget Discipleship

- ▶ Ultimately, every discipleship and mentoring program needs to help people **understand how spirituality impacts their financial decisions.**
- ▶ The best way to do this is through the example and encouragement that comes from a one-on-one relationship.



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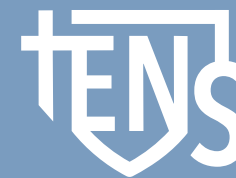
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Make Questions Normative

- ▶ 56% of 18–24-year-olds identified with a religion in 2023–24, down from 74% in 2007 – but the decline has stabilized. (Pew Research Center, Religious Landscape Study, Feb. 2025)
- ▶ 65% of Gen Z identifies as spiritual, even if not formally religious – they are open to questions, doubt, and exploration of faith. (CNS/Pew, 2025)
- ▶ As a whole, they are more comfortable with questions and uncertainty about faith, and open to learning



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Diversity is Key

- ▶ Millennials and Gen-Z are the most racially diverse generations. **43% are non-white.**
- ▶ When the leadership and worship leaders are mono-racial, **there is a disconnect** with what these young people see in their workplaces, schools, and friend groups and what they experience in Church.
- ▶ Raise up non-white leaders
- ▶ Seek, recruit, and hire for diversity in gender, identity, and ability



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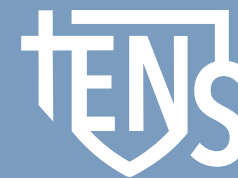
Optimism Attracts

- ▶ 19% of Millennials and GenZ think that leaders can be trusted.
 - ▶ Media, True-Crime TV, headlines of corruption
- ▶ The Christian Hope – the desire, conviction, and connection to change the world is a message that appeals
- ▶ We must learn to capture the hope of the New Jerusalem and use it to talk about the brilliant future God has for us



Politics are Important ... locally!

- ▶ Half of Millennials and Gen-Z claim no party affiliation – independence is attractive. Ideas over Ideology
- ▶ We must avoid talking about politics by name in our church, but talk about issues instead.
- ▶ Local initiatives are more appealing than those of far-away Washington



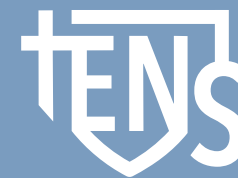
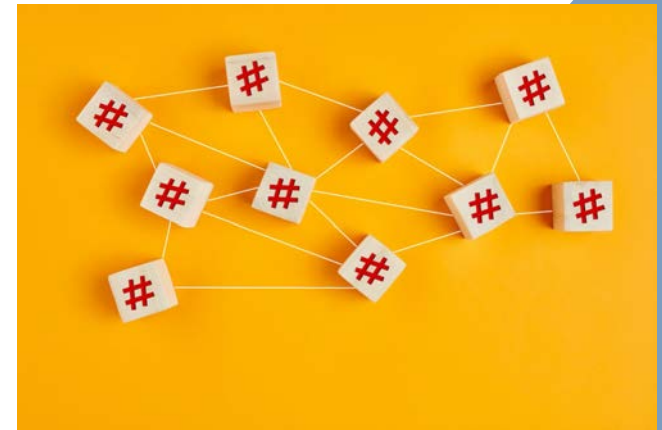
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Don't be Web 2.0 in a post Web 3.0 World

- ▶ Early websites provided information, but no interaction
- ▶ Social media created a generation of user-generated content and an exchange of ideas, even if often hard to control or distasteful
- ▶ Church must do more than have a presence on Facebook, X, and Instagram – Gen Z now lives on TikTok, YouTube, and Discord. *we must engage a story thousands of years old with the tools at our disposal today.*
- ▶ Dialogue, genuine questions, meaningful interaction.

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Giving is Easy: Here's how!

Adopt as many methods for accepting donations as your staff and volunteers can effectively manage

- ▶ **Online giving** platform/s
- ▶ **Mobile / App-based giving** platform/s
- ▶ Pledge forms or Intentions to Give are **easily available** (online is great!)
- ▶ Instructions on how to give by **ACH or bill pay**
- ▶ Instructions on how to give **securities**
- ▶ Reminder that members may give from their **required minimum distribution** (not in 2020) or **qualified charitable distribution**
- ▶ **Planned Giving** options are easy to find, and included on your pledge / intention cards

Don't forget to include time and talent intentions, too!

Broad Approaches to Fundraising



Did you miss our webinar on Virtual Stewardship 201? You can find it on our website at:
<https://www.tens.org/webinars-events/tens-webinars/virtual-stewardship-201/>



TENS Theme for 2026

When God arranges a banquet, there is always room for more. If we can't get another chair around the table, we build a bigger one. That's how God's abundance works. This year's theme comes from the spiritual *Plenty Good Room*, which reminds us that in God's House, all we have to do is find a seat and sit down.

This statement of abundance is a testimony to who provide healing, shelter, nourishment, and love to each other and our neighbors. There is always enough to go around.

*Then he sent some more servants and said, "Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner ... and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." **Matthew 22:4, NRSV***





Thank you!

For more information, resources, and videos,
find us at www.tens.org

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