

TMNBR 9/8/2014 “Continuing the Intergenerational Conversation”  
“Let us learn together what is good” (Job 34:4b NLT)  
Dr. Laura Mae Gardner (“Larrie”)

I appreciated the last two speakers on the topic of the generations and missions. Lisa’s even-handed discussion gave us a comprehensive look at the four generations that can be found in most established mission organizations. And Zach gave us a more in-depth view of his generation, the millennials.

Two poignant take-aways from Lisa included:

- The person of God is so multifaceted that no one type (or age or gender) of people speaking one language could accurately reflect the fullness of God. That’s why we repeatedly see in Scripture references to ‘nations, tongues, tribes and peoples’.
- The metaphor of the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12) reminds us that there are many parts, all of whom are equally important and essential. And so it is with the generations.

Zach gave a refreshing presentation of the millennials in terms of their potential, their use of technology, their interest in innovation, and I would add, their energy and optimism. They may well be the Greatest Generation at least in terms of their number—80 million by some counts, 53 million if one uses the years 18-29, and 74.3 million if one uses 18-34 years.

I have three main points:

**First, Perspective.** In John 4:35 Jesus said, “Lift up your eyes” and I suggest that we need to do that. We live in a world with a population of 7,072,622,454 persons, and growing all the time. John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world...and our world is in trouble. One of my friends, an author, called this ‘a troubled and tarnished world.’”

**Second, Context.**

1. War and unrest on every side. The UN said ‘at any point there are 70 wars going on around the world’ (Russia/Ukraine) and we know quite well that racial unrest in our own country is increasing.
2. Persecution and hostile ideologies increasing. Note the map. Read *The Voice of the Martyrs*, *Sorrow and Blood*, and *The Insanity of God*.

3. Evil is becoming more overt – northern Iraq and the ISIS. In addition there is an ongoing powerful spiritual battle going on—our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against powers in high places
4. Bewilderment and a lack of trust, in leaders, in government, in the media. No one knows any more what really is truth.
5. Poverty: material, relational, spiritual, linguistic (deaf people, displaced, unreached and illiterate.
6. Refugees, immigration, displaced peoples
7. Relief intervention is often ill-advised. Of the three stages of intervention (emergency aid during serious crises; rehabilitation and restoration to the pre-crisis condition; and development), most relief efforts focus only on the first.
8. Urbanization brings more people into cities—and slums are growing: Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Brazil, Capetown and Nairobi, Africa.
9. Issues around clean water, justice, illiteracy, human trafficking, oppression of women and children, sickness—HIV and AIDS, the Ebola outbreak—NTM is pulling its workers out of West Africa.
10. Pornification of the world—and lack of a moral basis for societal life. We are told that the next generation sees itself as spiritual but not religious.

“The Great Commission is too big for anyone to accomplish alone and too important not to try to do it together” Missio Nexus tagline.

**My third major point** is that we need to come together as generations, with respect and appreciation for what each brings to the table.

Someone said, “A man or a woman must stand somewhere. It is a good thing to have an open mind, but not open on both ends so nothing sticks, nothing is distinctive about that person. I believe we must hold some abiding truths around which we organize our lives.

One of those truths has to do with God’s program for the world. What part does Jesus’ command, Follow Me, play in our life plan? I believe whatever gifts I have were given me by God for the service of the Body of Christ, both those in the church now, and those yet to be won for Christ. Paul said, “I am constrained (II Cor. 5:14), and “I am not ashamed,” (Rom 1:16) “I press on” (Phil 3:12) and “I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus” (II Tim 2:10). How focused are we?

Rather than thinking about the differences between generations as differences, perhaps we could begin thinking of these as strengths to be shared, seeing the abilities and opportunities God has built into each generation, and that we need to make room for all of these generations to live and work in our mission organizations—together.

One of the characteristics of millennials is their lack of trust, and their need to see authenticity in the preceding generations. I believe these days are golden opportunities to come together as generations and share the uniquenesses and gifts we have.

The older generation has much to share—experience, wisdom, opportunity, encouragement, a faith history, Biblical knowledge, and missions awareness. They know the value of history in providing discernment. They are likely to know outcomes of given actions. We see where God is at work, and celebrate that.

And the millennials have much also to share—innovation, ease with technology, innovation, entrepreneurship, energy.

We could build connections by intentional mentoring. It is clear that both Zach and Amanda are intentionally involved in being mentored. I want to spend the last few minutes discussing how we set up a mentoring program.

The guiding values that Amanda and I chose included:

- humility
- reciprocity
- integrity
- intentionality
- respect
- appreciation
- vulnerability

We would avoid stereotyping. It was helpful, though, to voice the stereotypes we saw in each other's generation, so we could avoid these pitfalls. For example, Amanda said her generation saw mine as being judgmental, close-minded, critical, and out of date. And I could acknowledge that much has been said about millennials need for speed, superficial relationships, pampered, demanding without earning, etc.

We need to get rid of those stereotypes and see one another as unique, gifted, worthy of learning from.

Amanda and I meet once a week either by phone or in person, perhaps over a meal. We catch up with each other, and pray for each other at the end of our time together.

### **Where do we start?**

We have to commit ourselves to setting aside stereotypes, and come with humility and without advice to the table, committed to listen, willing to share experience and insight when appropriate. Millennials appreciate authenticity.

**How do we start?**—put ourselves with millennials, and build relationships. It doesn't start with big stuff; it starts with small efforts. Welcome them when they come to you

### **Questions and Discussion.**