

THE MOSAIC GENERATION:

The Future of Christianity? Who are they and how will they change the future?

[Leadership Advance Online](#)– Issue VII

by Wayne Oppel

Who Are These Mosaics?

Although it is difficult to identify the precise beginning and end of the Mosaic Generation, also known as the Millennial Generation, scholars generally agree that it began with those born in 1982, and has ended with those born around 2002. The Mosaic Generation is currently the youngest generation and has distinct characteristics that differentiate it from previous generations.

Highly educated, Mosaics are well behaved and have a positive outlook on life. With the exception of the War on Terror, they have been blessed to live during a time of stability in America and around the globe when a high percentage of adults are concerned about the welfare of children. Therefore, they have been the focus of countless educational, healthcare and community initiatives designed to reverse the negative trends of previous generations. While research is only available on the oldest members of the Mosaic Generation, preliminary results indicate that these initiatives have been effective in forming the unique characteristics and behaviors of this generation.

What Are Mosaic's Searching For?

Family Relationships. The single highest concern of the Mosaic Generation is their relationships with both family and friends. While teenagers have developed a reputation for resisting too many interactions with parents, this newest set of teenagers is changing that. They identify their parents as the single most important influence on their lives, they prioritize the development of family values and they enjoy engaging in deep, personal conversations with them. Contributing to these improved relationships are smaller families, a decrease in divorce and abortion rates and greater prioritization of children and families.

Friendship. Less surprising is the importance Mosaics place on friendship. Unlike previous generations, Mosaics prefer to have a few very close friends rather than a large group of people to hang out with. These small groups of close friends cross gender and racial lines, which would have been unusual in their parents' generations. They usually make friends within the subculture to which they belong, i.e. athletes, musicians and technology groups. Although their friendships are very close, Mosaics also tend to change friends frequently. Nevertheless, they are extremely sensitive to relational dynamics and are likely to base decisions on relational impact.

Education. The Mosaic Generation also places high priority on educational attainment. While they do not necessarily like school any more than previous generations, they see it as crucial to their future success and happiness. As compared with recent generations, Mosaics study more, receive more

homework and have higher performance levels as shown in their test scores and the difficulty of their coursework. Because of the importance placed on academic achievement, the competitiveness of grades and the advanced education acceptance of a generation that is academically strong, Mosaics often experience stress, fear of failure and thus, avoid taking risks.

Generational Strengths

Based on the preceding information, one would correctly assume that the Mosaic Generation exhibits a number of strengths, the primary strength being their outlook on life. They are, as a group, optimistic about the future in general, and their own lives in particular. They have a positive self-image and are generally happy and satisfied with life. Of course, these characteristics are of little surprise for a generation in whose formative years “the Dow Jones only goes up, people only get wealthier, and America and its Allies only fight effortless wars.” Events that have occurred since the compilation of existing research on the Mosaic Generation, may have tempered Mosaic optimism somewhat, but the general tenor of their outlook is still positive.

Mosaics are also reversing the behavior trends of previous generations in positive ways. They are moving away from drug and alcohol use, they commit less crime and they respect rules more than youth a generation ago. They are trusting of authority and believe in the institutional systems that run their countries. They are less materialistic and more experiential; they would rather seek out new and exciting experiences than spend hours at the mall. Finally, they are more tolerant of difference and consequently, much more racially and ethnically integrated.

Generational Weaknesses

While the Mosaic Generation will undoubtedly be a positive force as it comes of age, it has certain characteristic weaknesses that must also be recognized. One of its biggest weaknesses is conformity. More and more students, even in public schools, wear uniforms. More projects emphasize teamwork and result in group grading. Both gifted and disabled children are mainstreamed into regular classes and lessons are designed for the group as a whole. Cooperation is emphasized over independent thought or creativity, and while it is valuable in the development of social skills, it has led to the development of a generation that is more bland, less creative and more dependent on peer support. Even Mosaics themselves acknowledge that they tend to be generic and interchangeable.

Other negative characteristics of the Mosaic Generation result from its overbooked, overactive life styles. Mosaics participate in more scheduled activities than any other generation, i.e. before and after school programs, athletic leagues, summer camps and innumerable other demands on their time. It is not surprising, then, that Mosaics are perpetually under stress, do not get enough sleep, have short attention spans, feel no strong commitment to any one activity or purpose and have little experience with introspection.

Mosaic Faith

Basic statistical data on the religious beliefs and practices of the Mosaic Generation are encouraging at first glance, but also reveal some potential problems. Ninety-six percent believe in God and 65 percent believe in the God of the Bible. Eighty-seven percent believe that Jesus was a real person, but only 44 percent think that Jesus was resurrected and 53 percent believe that Jesus sinned during his life. Two-thirds of Mosaics believe that salvation does not depend on Jesus. Seventy-six percent of Mosaics pray in a usual day and 85 percent believe that prayer can bring about changes; however, they are more likely to seek help from friends and family than from God. Seventy-one percent believe that Christianity is relevant to their lives, 55 percent currently attend worship and there are increased numbers of prayer groups in schools. Additionally, of those who are Christians, one-third attempt to practice evangelism. These statistics indicate that the Mosaic Generation has the potential to become a vibrant segment of the faith community; they also indicate, however, that Mosaics' thoughts on faith are not always consistent or well formed.

It is expected that Mosaics will spend less time on religious activities than their parents do now, and only one-third say they are likely to attend church after leaving home. Even those who expect to attend church are likely to move from church to church rather than commit to membership within one parish or even one denomination.

One reason for this low expectation of church participation results from the pluralism of the Mosaic Generation; they are more open to combining beliefs and practices from different faith traditions into their own unique variation of spirituality. This mixing of traditions is possible because having grown up in a postmodern culture, Mosaics reject the idea that any one religion has a corner on Truth. While they value the potential for a relationship with God, only half of those who want a relationship with God want to participate in a church.

In spite of the disheartening initial indications about Mosaic church involvement, research indicates that steps can be taken to encourage Mosaic participation. It is important, however, to first identify why Mosaics attend church. According to generational historians and authors Neil Howe and William Strauss, "Mosaics see church as a way to cut through the clutter of contemporary life, to find relief from the pop culture, to meet like-minded members of the opposite sex, and to do good civil deeds." George Barna, directing leader of the Barna Group, further quantifies these observations, indicating that, of the two-thirds of Mosaic youth who attend some sort of youth group in a given month, 25 percent come to learn about God, 20 percent come for activities and 50 percent come to interact with friends. Whatever their main reason for attending, Mosaics will not return to a youth group if there is no religious substance; Mosaics demand solid, personally applicable content. They want to learn about the faith and then go out and take action in a way that serves society.

The biggest challenge the church faces in its ministry to the Mosaics is finding a way to increase Mosaics' commitment.

Mosaic Christianity

The change in the future for Christianity will be a confluence of the new sociological trends to return to a more committed and traditional way of life. The new theological thrust will be a return to the tradition of faith, especially the faith of classical Christianity expressed by the fathers of the church, the ancient ecumenical creeds and the practices of worship and spirituality found in the great traditions of the faith community.

It will teach doctrine through creative artistic expression and preaching, with the teaching and preaching emphasizing personal interaction and creativity. Leadership will be non-hierarchical. The leader will be an empowering leader who helps others to express their Christianity, rather than someone who demonstrates institutional power. The focus for the leader will be to encourage the members to grow spiritually and express their individual gifts in ministry. There will be a tendency to have small intimate groups where members minister to one another spiritually, which may include praying for one another, counseling one another, sharing a meal or just loving one another.

This change in faith practices will be Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical, Charismatic and global. It will be Catholic in the recovery of transcendence, greater attention to ritual as symbol, more attention to ceremony, the space in which worship takes place and more frequent celebration of the Eucharist. It will be Reformed in its attention to the Word and the recovery of strong preaching. It will be Evangelical in its emphasis on the recovery of the Christian meta-narrative in structure, song, preaching and Eucharistic prayer. It will be Charismatic in its attention to presence, the role of gifts in worship and to the ritual of healing. It will be global because the Mosaic culture has common values, thought-patterns and communication styles, digital and nonverbal at the same time, that reach around the world.

Thomas Hohstadt, founder of futurechurch.net, stated that “A time traveler would not recognize the church 50 years from now as the ‘church.’” He said that reality will be perceived in different ways and the church will prove “truth” in a different way. The Christian world will simply think differently. Science, technology, creativity and spiritual experience will become so blended that they will appear as one. For example, faith, meditation, prophecy, quantum theory, chaos theory, creativity, art and virtual reality will become virtual synonyms.

In the same way, language will also change. Metaphor, multiple and Mosaic thinking will replace the linear logic of today. Within the new language, communion with God will prove miraculously profound, involving the intuitive senses and feelings far more than the reasoning intellect. For these reasons, something similar to the “Gifts of the Spirit” will pervade worship and every worshiper will participate.

Though the church will remain “in the world, but not of the world” the line between secular and sacred will blur, for worship will happen anytime, anyplace, anywhere and with anybody, and it will be global and transcultural.

It will be necessary to remember that the world is pluralistic and that Christianity, in its present form, will continue to exist and maybe flourish. This new form of Christianity may not be the dominant style, but it will be viable in the postmodern world. Each Christian needs to be open to how God, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is leading their particular church. The ultimate and most important thing a church can do is to be real, authentic and genuine, and be open to God’s leading as they listen to the text of Scripture and of culture.

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