

5/3/2023

# **BRAVE CHURCH – HARD TOPICS**



**The Rise of the Nones  
and the Future of the Church**

# BC/HT Covenant



We will...

accept conflict and commit to the way of kindness.

take responsibility for how our words are received.

ask permission before we challenge someone's views on a subject.

show respect for one another and graciously receive feedback if someone feels disrespected.

use 'I' instead of 'you' statements. We will not accuse or attack.

give everyone who wants to speak an opportunity to do so.

# The Rise of the Nones and the Future of the Church

Who are the “Nones”?

Trends in the US

What are Millennials and Gen Zers looking for?

What does this mean for the church?

# Who are the “Nones”?

This is a complex group- it includes:

- atheists and agnostics
- people who believe in some higher power/ but don't align with a religion
- people who identify as Christians but do not currently attend church
- people who have been hurt by the church

Sources: [Pew Research Center, 2018](#); [Pew Research Center, 2022](#); [Evolving Faith](#)

*Atheists*      *Agnostics*  
*Skeptics*

**Spiritual but  
not religious**

*Seekers*      *Questioners*

**Religious exiles**

**Ex-[insert  
denomination] wanderers**      **Religious**

# We know where the Nones *aren't* ... so where are they?

## Brainstorm:

Where do you think these folks who aren't in church may be finding community, spirituality, ways of serving/helping others somewhere else?



# Trends in American Religion

Fewer Americans call themselves Christians today (64% in 2020 survey)

About 30% of Americans call themselves 'Nones' today

Christianity may no longer be a majority in US by 2070, depending on assumptions

- Though this may be countered by an influx of Christian immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa
- However, there's no guarantee that white Christian churches will adapt to the immigrant wave

The 'traditional' pattern is that many people who change religions do so at young ages (15-29). However, since the 1990s, a measurable number of 30-65 year olds are switching from Christianity to 'nones'

Sources: [Pew Research Center, 2022](#); [Predictions about the decline of Christianity in America...](#)

# More on Trends

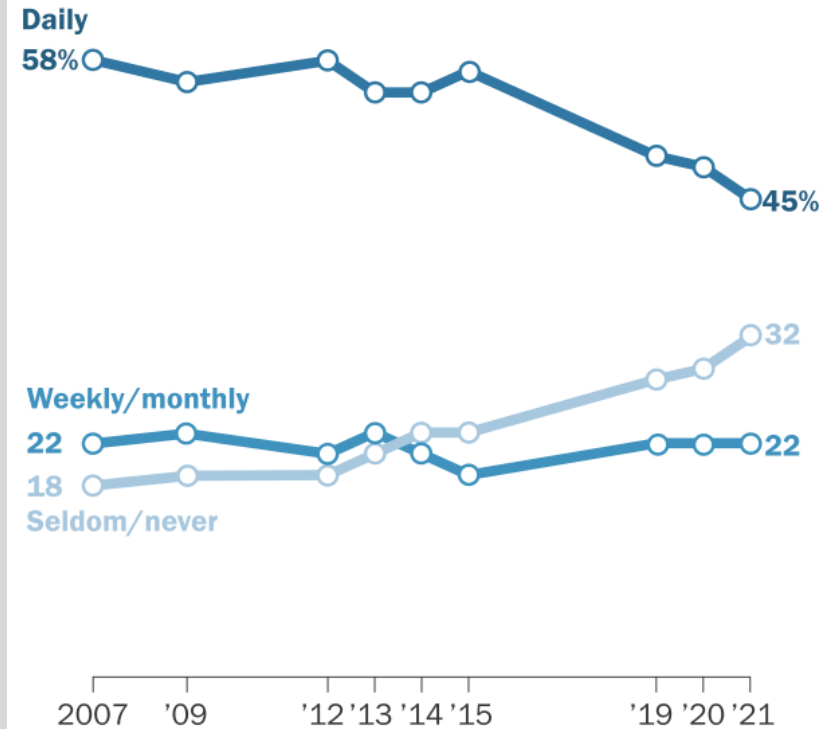
## In U.S., roughly three-in-ten adults now religiously unaffiliated

% of U.S. adults who identify with ...



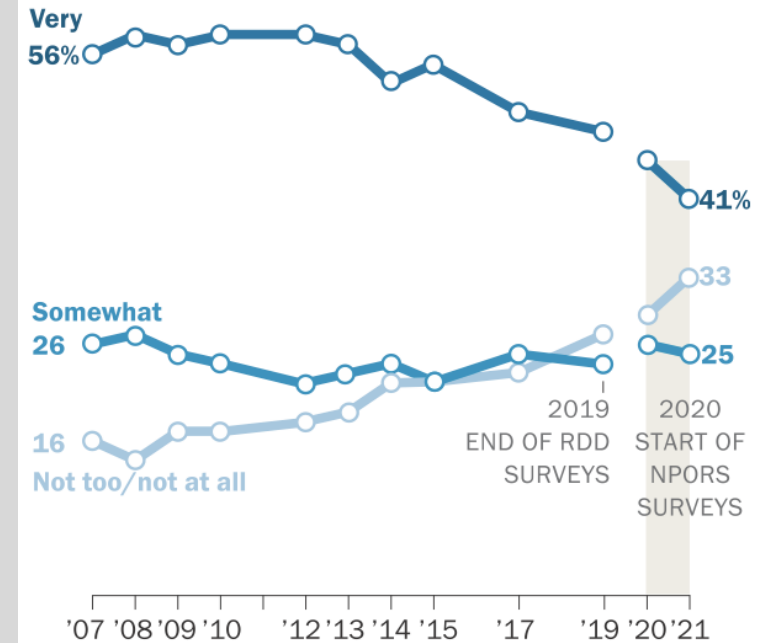
## Fewer than half of U.S. adults pray daily

% of U.S. adults who say they pray ...



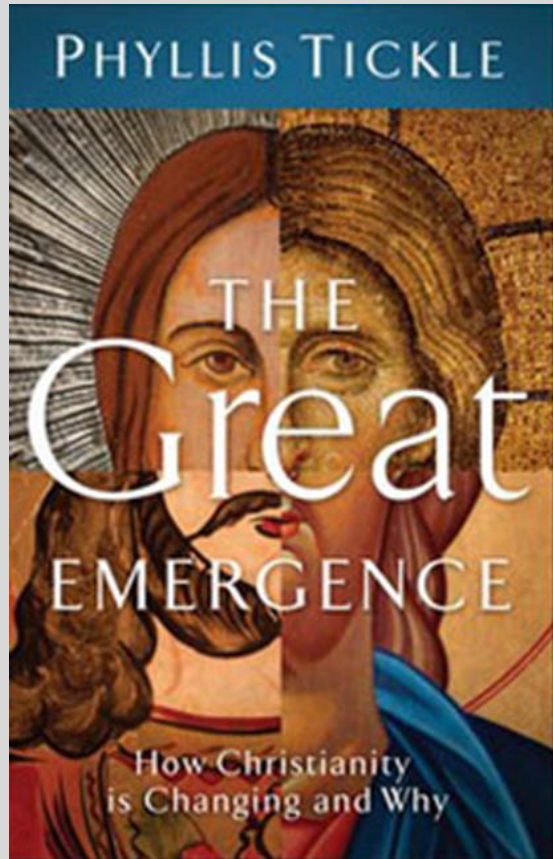
## Four-in-ten U.S. adults consider religion 'very important' in their lives

% of U.S. adults who say religion is \_\_\_\_ important in their life



Sources: [Pew Research Center, 2022](https://www.pewresearch.org/2022/01/26/religious-landscape/)

# Something new... Like a rummage sale?



**The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why by Phyllis Tickle, 2008. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI**

Theory is every 500 years, the “church” has had a rummage sale, a major transformation; after the “sale”, Christianity readjusted, grew, and spread.

- 29 CE: Jesus died
- 476 CE: the fall of Rome
- 1054 CE: the East/West schism
- 1517 CE: Protestant Reformation

No one knows for sure what will happen, but, if the past is prologue, new understandings and ways of being a church may rise out this “upheaval.”



# Acts 2:42-47 – The First Major Transition

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

# What are Gen Z and Millennials looking for?

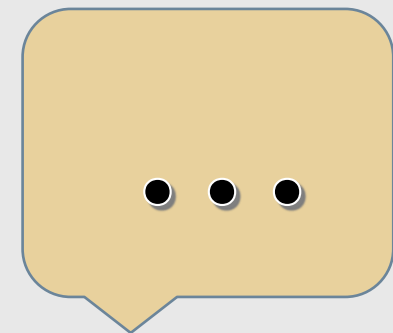
“Millennials seek a way to **incarnate their passions**: passion for a **just world**, passion for a **less judgmental church**, passion for **service that actually makes a difference**, passion for a **sustainable lifestyle**. These desires drive them to act, to incarnate, to take risks by becoming the change they seek for our world.” – Rev. Mark Yaconelli (Austin Theol. Sem.), in ***Neighborhood Church***

A Harvard survey of 18-29 years old found that a majority believe basic health care, food and shelter, efforts to reduce poverty and curb climate change should be a priority in this country. - [Spring 2023 Harvard Youth Poll](#)

What is your reaction to the priorities of millennials and Gen Zers? How does that compare to your priorities?

These younger generations are looking for more “authenticity” in their faith and life. What does that look like in the church?

## Discussion



# The Church's Response?

“Our failure as a church to capture the imagination, authenticity, and risk-willingness of this generation is crippling our incarnational capacity. It is symptomatic of our reluctance to get messy with the problems of our communities and to Millennials it communicates a disinterest in real and lasting change.”

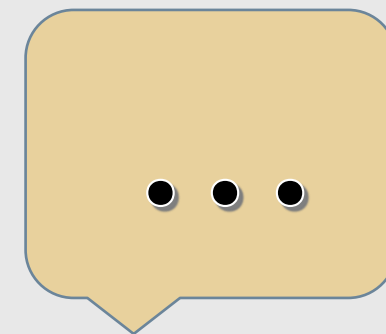
– Rev. Mark Yaconelli (Austin Theol. Sem.), in *Neighborhood Church*

Do you agree with this description of the church's failure?

If so, what should we do differently?

If not, how do we show those outside the church that we are living out our faith in the world?

## Discussion



# Membership or Missional Focus?

## Membership focus:

- Recruiting members to support the church's budget, buildings, and existing programs.
- Members' role is contributing money and effort, participating in events
- New members are prepared to support the church institution

## Missional focus:

- Sending people out into the world to do the work of the Spirit, serve God's mission to renew creation.
- Church is an outpost, a training center preparing people to follow Jesus in the world.
- Follows Jesus' practice with his disciples.

Source: [Moving from "membership confirmation" to "missional confirmation", Presbyterian Outlook, 4/19/2023](#)

# Performative or Formative Ministry

## Performative Ministry:

- Leaders do the praying, scripture reading, and talking about faith on behalf of the congregation.
- Members' role is to donate, volunteer, and show up to support the institution
- Focus: watching leaders

## Formative Ministry:

- Leaders equip all people to engage in simple but meaningful practices of prayer, service, advocacy and more.
- Members are invited along on a deep spiritual journey
- Focus: authentic relationship

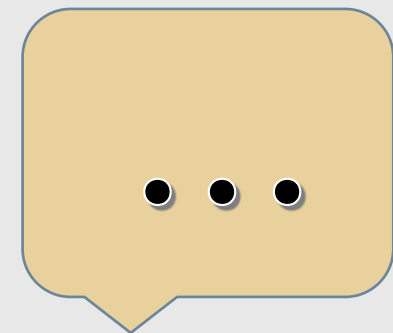
Source: [From Performative to Formative Ministry](#) – Faith+Lead, 4/4/2023

Where does Grace fall in these categories?

What would shifting to a more missional, or formative, approach look like at Grace?

What would change? Where would the challenges be?

## Discussion





# An Invitation to Hope...

**Can we trust the Holy Spirit with what's next for the church?**

Barbara Brown Taylor:

“I trust the Holy Spirit, Krista. That’s where I’m still real religious, is I still trust that wind that blows things around, and you don’t know where it came from and you don’t know where it goes, but it’s going to blow. And it’s blowing all the time. And the interesting thing is people my age get so distressed by what it’s blowing around. And then I meet younger people who are just comfortable with that. That’s the way a lot of their lives have been...But I think it’s a terrifying time ...It is also a really exciting time to see what happens next. And I won’t know.”

Source: [On Being, 4/6/23](#)