

UNDERSTANDING GENERATION X

by Rev. Thomas Soltis, SELC Stewardship Director

Generational Time Line

Traditionalists (born before 1945)
Baby Boomers (1946-1964)
Generation X (1965-1980)
Millennials (1981-2001)

Generation X

“X” represents the unknown in algebra. When it became obvious that the generation following the Baby Boomers didn’t think like their predecessors, no one knew what to call them. Hence the designation “X”. In his 1991 novel, “Generation X: Tales of An Accelerated Culture”, Douglas Coupland described Generation Xers as disengaged, pessimistic and well educated twenty somethings who could neither find a job in their field or find a way to the good life. Their world was full of bad news - divorced parents; “latch-key kids” (no one home after school); run-aways (missing children listed on milk cartons); economic instability; political crises; international conflicts. Lacking family, they found new families in friends. They became cynical, having a hard time trusting. They lived for today. A drug culture, coupled with free love and communal groups, helped nurture an anti-establishment rebellious sub culture.

What Shaped the Xers?

With the passage of the “No Fault Divorce Law” in the seventies, family stability was disrupted. A surge in working Boomer mothers took place. Children were neglected. The security of love was found among peers. Economic pressures made proper employment difficult. Heavy debts were incurred. The arrival of credit cards and their abuse made matters worse. Xers became cynical skeptics with a “*true for you but not for me*” attitude. With computer internet access, they gained access to information “beyond the news”. They quickly learned you can’t believe everything you’ve read or been told. They distrusted the establishment. Traditionalists and Boomers categorized them as “slackers”; “cell phone addicts”. Communication with friends via phones, however, helped construct peer families and communities unique to themselves. Despite their personal turmoil, Xers still maintained a form of spirituality and retained a sense of humor.

Spirituality of Xers

The mind set of Xers that “something can be true for you but not for me” left them believing that truth is constructed by group thought and not revealed by God or discovered by reason and science. They generally embraced the spirit of Franklin Schaeffer’s new philosophy: “There are no objective facts, just personal histories and the coincidences of time and place through the lenses of short lives. Deal with it.” The fact that Xers placed limits on reason and science as sources of truth, is good news for Christianity. They are receptive to Scripture even though they have questions about it’s absolute accuracy. Many Biblical tenets are readily received especially if they are practical and *work*. Though outside the Church, Xers like Christ for his moral premises and especially for his anti-establishment stance battling hypocrisy and injustice. In the 1990’s, many Xers wore WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelets. They understood many things Jesus morally *taught*, to the point of following His example. However, many didn’t understand and embrace the way He spiritually *thought*. The fact that Xers are open to Scripture and admire Christ as someone to emulate, provides a terrific platform from which the Church can reach out and share the Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit converts. Christians are simply His channels of communication. Xers need to hear a world view with eternal dimensions to dispel a cynical, skeptical “true for you but not for me” mentality.

Reaching Out to Xers

- > **Personal Evangelism** - *Individual* Christians should lovingly share their faith in the Gospel.
- > **Family** - Help Xers find *family* within the Church among friendly Christ-centered people.
- > **Interactive Worship** - Alongside traditional services, *contemporary worship* with more spontaneity and media use could prove helpful.
- > **Community Action** - Reach out from the church building to the community with Christ-centered *actions of service*.

RELATED RESOURCES

www.selc.lcms.org - Personal Stewardship

“*Managing Millennials*”

“*Personal Evangelism*”