

Generational Imprinting—UUFVB Covenant Groups—April 2020

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: What is most on your mind today?

Opening Readings

“Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it.” (*George Orwell, pen name for Eric Arthur Blair, English novelist and essayist*)

“I have to study politics and war so that my sons can study mathematics, commerce and agriculture, so their sons can study poetry, painting and music.” (*John Quincy Adams, 6th President of the United States*)

“I have had enough experience in all my years, and have read enough of the past, to know that advice to grandchildren is usually wasted. If the second and third generations could profit by the experience of the first generation, we would not be having some of the troubles we have today.” (*Harry S. Truman, 33rd President of the United States*)

Topic Exploration

D-Day--June 6, 1944; President Kennedy's assassination; the first moon landing; the fall of the Berlin Wall; Tuesday September 11, 2001; stock market crashes; scientific or technological breakthroughs. Landmark period events like these become etched into our collective consciousness and simultaneously impact everyone, but particularly if we witnessed them during our adolescence or young adulthood. To what extent do these world-changing events shape our individual character? According to many theories, the fashion, music, cultural values, and global events of our formative years, such as the Vietnam War, imprint on our generation and leave on us some psychological marks or traits we share with our peers, or cohorts.

Social scientists generally define birth cohorts by the hugely impactful cultural events or changes that serve as bookends of an era. This leads to widely accepted traits ascribed to each generation.

- Members of the Greatest Generation (born before 1928) fought in World War II, and came of age during the Great Depression. They now represent roughly 2% of the population.
- The Silent Generation (those born between 1928 and 1945) were children of the Great Depression and World War II. It includes some who also fought in WWII, most who fought in the Korean War, and many who fought in the Vietnam War. This group makes up about 11% of the population.
- Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) represent about 30% of the adult population. They are viewed in relation to the postwar climate of prosperity and the resulting rise of consumerism. Perhaps the most influential generation in history, this one is known for its pivotal roles in the civil rights movement, Woodstock, and the Vietnam War. Baby Boomers value relationships, as they did not grow up with technology running their lives.
- Generation X (Gen X) members were born between 1965 and 1980, and make up about 24% of the population. Unlike the Baby Boomers, Generation X is focused more on work-life balance rather than following the straight-and-narrow path of Corporate America.
- Millennials (Gen Y) were born between 1981 and 1996 and are seen as the last generation to grow up without the full influence of the Internet, and the first to come of age under the somber specter of 9/11.

They represent about 30% of adults. The Millennial generation got its start in an era of economic prosperity and tends to focus on the self. Its members are seen as more idealistic, more confrontational, and less willing to accept diverse points of view.

- **Generation Z (Gen Z)** members were born between about 1997 and 2012, and are projected to represent about 10% of the population by 2020. Members of this cohort group have been exposed from earliest youth to the internet, to social networks, and to mobile systems. Gen Zers value individual expression and avoid labels, mobilize themselves for a variety of causes, and believe profoundly in the efficacy of dialogue to solve conflicts and improve the world. Finally, they make decisions and relate to institutions in a highly analytical and pragmatic way.

(Adapted from Association for Psychological Science, Psychology Today, and Pew Research)

Questions / Sharing

1. Which generational group do you chronologically belong to? Do you identify with that group or do you share traits with another cohort group?
2. How have the historical events of your generation shaped you or affected your world view?
3. In your opinion, what are the defining moments of your generation?
4. What generational ideal have you attempted to pass on to the younger generation?
5. What ideals do you remember your parents trying to instill in you? Were they successful?
6. Do you attempt to keep up with the times or are you a “generational dinosaur”?
7. What do you least understand about the younger generation? What about older generations?
8. How do your attitudes affect your communication with persons of other generations?
9. Are there things we might do individually and collectively to foster greater understanding and thus connection between and among generations?

Closing Reading

Generation to Generation

In a house which becomes a home,
one hands down and another takes up
the heritage of mind and heart,
laughter and tears, musings and deeds.
Love, like a carefully loaded ship,
crosses the gulf between the generations.
Therefore, we do not neglect the ceremonies
of our passage: when we wed, when we die,
and when we are blessed with a child;
When we depart and when we return;
When we plant and when we harvest.
Let us bring up our children. It is not

the place of some official to hand to them
their heritage.

If others impart to our children our knowledge
and ideals, they will lose all of us that is
wordless and full of wonder.

Let us build memories in our children,
lest they drag out joyless lives,
lest they allow treasures to be lost because
they have not been given the keys.

We live, not by things, but by the meanings
of things. It is needful to transmit the passwords
from generation to generation.

(Antoine de Saint-Exupery, French writer & poet)

Check-out and reflections on today's session: Please express any closing thoughts on the content or process of today's session.

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
these we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping