

My Personal Assessment - First Gen, Millennials, Generation Z and the Church

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As 2025 begins, I am finding that many first-generation members are feeling uneasy.

These are members who love God and True Parents very much. They are frustrated with their local churches. Many of them did not join a church, but rather a movement guided by and following the ideas of Rev. Sun Myung Moon. In San Francisco, there was not even a Sunday Service. Members either witnessed, fundraised or attended the weekend workshop.

They were willing to sacrifice tremendously, in hopes that their sacrifices would help rejuvenate the United States. Many had finished college, others had dropped out after meeting the Unification Movement, and most were concerned that their efforts might join those of other like-minded young people who stood against, not just what they viewed as an unjust war in Southeast Asia but also the corruption in the government and

the violation of the environment.

They were willing to sleep in sleeping bags on the floor like caterpillars (from Mrs. Durst), foregoing restaurants, movie theaters, rock concerts and even going home for the holidays. Mostly "western" members, they came from nearly every English-speaking country in the world, albeit many with funny accents. But most valuable, they were willing to give up all their worldly goods and career paths (as Jesus had asked the rich man) to contribute their lives to fulfilling God's dreams.

As the years progressed, they participated in all the providential activities involved in Madison Square Garden, Yankee Stadium, Washington Monument, "three days of fasting for "Forgive, Love and Unite" and seven days at the UN for North Korean freedom, the founding of UTS, CARP, the Incheon Movie, signature campaigns galore and so many other projects initiated by True Parents.

The movement continued to grow in America, though not quite reaching its goal of 30,000 members. While so many other new religious groups faded out, the Unification Movement continued to grow. Yet True Father never claimed to form a church. He even changed the name from Unification Church to the Family Federation. However, as local centers across the country began to grow, they also began to evolve into traditional church structures.

Though today we have an American Unification Church President and North American continental leader being Western for the first time, many of the church leaders and members are Oriental. They seem to be following the traditional ways of a church. This has frustrated many of the older American members who no longer participate in their regional church programs.

Most of the first generation's children are millennials (born between the 1982 Blessing and 1995) and, with few exceptions, they are not involved in the church. Their values are significantly different from ours and from those of Generation "Z" (born after 1995).

The kids born since 1995 are now avidly attending the church programs, CARP and joining GPA at a significant rate. My doctoral dissertation has taught me that this difference is primarily generational. While the millennials seem primarily focused on their jobs, their houses, and their careers, they aren't into politics (most often they don't vote) and they don't seem enamored of American History, including the traditions of the Founding Fathers. They are family-oriented, may love God and have traditional family values that they were taught by their Unification parents, but their ideals are quite opposite from the early American members.

I always wondered where the early American members were (especially those who joined under Young Oon Kim), and now that we have been in the church for 50 years and are ourselves elder members, we are on our own and simply choose how much to involve ourselves in church projects. One seminary graduate I know, who had given numerous sermons over the years, is not even asked to speak in his own local church anymore.

So, on April 13th the Cheon Won Gung was dedicated and many first-generation members flew to Korea and attended the festivities with True Mother. Yet, many more did not. True Mother was accompanied on the stage by two of her grandsons, who were also anointed for a special position.

Where our movement will go from here is yet to be seen. The leadership of our church is changing, with more and more second-generation children taking leadership positions, while more and more first-generation members, although still faithful to God and True Parents, are stepping back from everyday church activities. This could be due to the fact that our movement is truly morphing into a "traditional" church structure. True Parents' theology and lifestyle is continuing to guide our lives and to be as strong as ever.

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