

# Churchy lingo turns off Millennials

November 21, 2013

ATLANTA (ABP)—If there were an 11th commandment, for Millennials it might be “thou shalt ban pious slogans from thy midst.”

In fact, faith-based lingo is coming under increased scrutiny as younger Americans who came of age around the turn of the millennium increasingly cite churchy language as a major turn-off to congregational life.



Michael Gregg Baptist minister Michael Gregg saw that clearly in [a recent Washington Post blog](#) titled “5 churchy phrases that are scaring off Millennials,” which he reposted on Facebook.

The blog reminded him outsiders looking and listening in on the church may be confused or offended by deep spiritual concepts reduced to pithy sayings, he said.

“When you hear ‘God is in control,’ you have to think, ‘What about all the bad things that happen?’” said Gregg, the minister of educational life at [Northside Drive Baptist Church in Atlanta](#). “Those are the kinds of things Millennials are asking.”

Addie Zierman, the writer of the *Washington Post* blog, is a member of that generation. She grew up in an evangelical church and abandoned

organized Christianity before joining a community church in Minnesota.

Zierman reminded readers young people are leaving or avoiding church, many times, because of the odd things they hear in sanctuaries and from Christians. Much of it creates an insiders-versus-outsiders feel.



Addie Zierman “Here is what I can tell you about Millennials,” Zierman wrote. “We grew up on easy answers, catchphrases and clichés, and if we’ve learned anything, it’s that things are almost always more complicated than that.”

Jargon is unavoidable when human beings form into groups, religious or otherwise, Zierman noted in an interview.

“The problem for me is that when these things become cliché, especially in religious terminology, they carry a lot of baggage with them,” she said.

That baggage may feel judgmental to visitors, especially when terms like “believer,” “unbeliever” and “backslider” are used.

“And then there’s the way clichés terminate conversations—like ‘the Bible clearly says,’” Zierman said. “That’s a final answer that leaves no room for doubt, no room for questions and no room for sharing your feelings.”

That’s why Susan Rogers tries to make little room for churchy jargon at [The Well at Springfield](#), a Cooperative Baptist missional church plant in Jacksonville, Fla.



Susan RogersThe subject has come up during church dinners and discussion meetings, Rogers said. Participants have noted such language can come across as simplistic.

“I feel they’re dismissive of the mystery of God, dismissive of the complexity of suffering, and they don’t do anything to open up discussion,” Rogers said.

She noted a couple of clichés she dislikes the most: “Everything happens for a reason” and “It’s a God thing.”

The latter is used when something amazing or positive happens, Rogers said. “But it’s never a God thing when everything falls apart, and you have to seek encouragement and love from your community.”



Tony LankfordThe logic behind that cliché, she added, would mean God is not present in the Philippines, where a typhoon killed thousands and destroyed several villages and towns. “The problem is that God is just as present—and even more so—in our brokenness,” she said.

These issues really are nothing new, said Tony Lankford, pastor of [Park Avenue Baptist Church in Atlanta](#). Pastors can help by reminding members

regularly about the power their words can have. Congregations also must be schooled repeatedly on the lingo it uses to define key mission areas.

For example, terms like “outreach,” “neighbor” and “ministry” can mean different things at different churches, Lankford said.

“For those of us with younger Christians, we bear the responsibility of helping them form that language and telling them what it means,” he said.