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Foreword

I have known Dr. Joshua Mitchell for several years as a colleague and peer. Our time at Virginia Union University formed a bond between us as scholars pursuing culturally relevant work. I have worked with Mitchell on national platforms and witnessed his investment and innovation with Millennials in Houston. As he finished his doctoral work, I was encouraged to see him honing a specialization and clearly defined work around Christian education and discipleship as it relates to black Millennials—a severely underexplored area of practical theology. At a time when few resources are created for the black church, there are far fewer who are concerned with black Millennials. The deficit in this area causes a continuation in a gap that is implosive and destructive to the church.

At a time when Millennials are the buzzword, the excitement around this generation often stops at monetary gain and pastoral bragging rights. “Targeting” Millennials is pervasive in the culture. Everyone wants to know how to attract Millennials for the sake of increasing revenue. From churches to retailers, organizations want to “sell” to Millennials—although no one seems to be able to reciprocate by buying into the unique contributions Millennials bring to the world. As a researcher and consultant, I begin with refusing to create or share gimmicks. I am most pleased to say Dr. Mitchell has not created a book of gimmicks to manipulate Millennials. While most are attempting to tame the monster, he is amplifying the voice of Millennials themselves by

sharing their stories for the sake of empowering and equipping our generation.

Not only is work on black Millennials unique and most honestly neglected, a resource allowing black Millennials to read the work of other black Millennials is premier. As a true Millennial himself, Mitchell has created a work that is attractive to other Millennials while including insights and practical tools for older generations of church leaders to implement.

It is imperative that anyone attempting to illuminate the complexities, desires, and systemic barriers of Millennials approach that work with sincerity and courage. Mitchell walks the fine line of exposing the flaws and negligence of the church while encouraging and uplifting the church, leaving congregations with a hope for the future. He does not sanitize the voice of our generation, nor negate the experience of the black church.

Churches and pastors will benefit from the stories shared by black Millennials in this volume. The anonymity used to tell the church's story without embarrassment allows for mutual understanding and exposure. Today, intergenerational conversations are loaded too often with blame and indictments based on feelings and little focus on the goal. The goal is to enhance and empower not just the narrative of the black church but to perfect its humanity, integrity, and engagement in ways that allow progress and hospitality in the world. Mitchell writes toward the goal of a healthy, intergenerational church inspired by the work of all and enhanced by the gifts of the body as a whole through Christian education and cultural progression.

It is my hope that this book will begin a conversation between pastors, staff, congregations, and scholars that produces space for change. It is my prayer that such conversation will transform the church and create spaces where Millennials have not merely a lone voice or token seat at the table, but real stock in the success and longevity of the black church as an institution, community, and incubator for global solutions.

Rev. Dr. Brianna K. Parker
Founding Curator, Black Millennial Cafe