

# THE SAGE

## Baby Boomers: The Church's Linchpin Generation

by Rev. Dr. William Randolph

Have you ever played Jenga? If you have, then you probably remember removing the wrong block at some point and the whole tower collapsing. The wrong block is always the block that supports the structure. The boomer generation might be compared to the linchpin Jenga block, in that if we remove this generation from the church, the church will start to collapse. Historically, this is what has happened with the boomer generation as it left the church (or never joined in the first place). The flight of baby boomers from the church coincides with the decline in the United Methodist Church in the United States, which went from a high point of fourteen million members to fewer than eight million members.

Decades ago, church leaders understood that baby boomers were a linchpin generation. A linchpin is what holds the wheel on the axle. It is what holds the various elements of a structure together. Church leaders at the time noticed just how overwhelmingly large this generation was, and they created a youth ministry to respond. This was the beginning of specialized pastors known as youth pastors, and the old Epworth League was reborn as the Methodist Youth Fellowship. Church leaders of that time believed that baby boomers were the future of the church. Unfortunately, for the church, its leaders never fully comprehended the differences in this generation from previous generations, nor were they prepared fully for the forces of change at work during boomers' lifetimes. As a result, many of the youth the church sought to retain either never became

active in the church or left when they became adults.

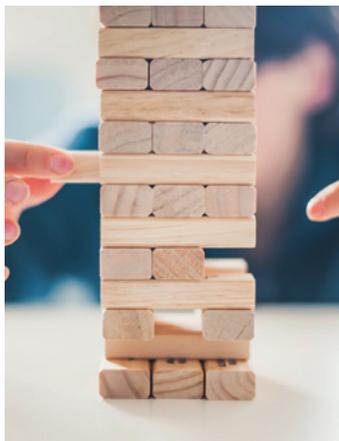
Youth ministry took off, however, and the church has continued to place its emphasis upon working with succeeding generations of youth (baby busters and millennials), believing *these* generations to be the future of the church. As church leaders worked hard to attract, incorporate, and assimilate

these newer generations of youth into the church, they forgot about the baby boomers and moved on. But boomers' influence on society did not go away.

Boomers will continue to exert their influence even as millennials (thanks to the influx of a large number of immigrant millennials) surpass the boomers the largest generation present in the United States. The impact of the boomers is not

only because of the sheer size of the generation (78 million births from 1946-64 versus 74 million births for millennials, 1984-2002), but because this generation has influenced everything it has touched as it has lived through accelerated change. Moreover, the boomer generation serves as a bridge generation, connecting the previous generations with future generations.

It is the boomer generation that can serve the church, not only to populate our churches and support our programs, but also to change the whole course of the aging ministry of the church. Some historians and religious commentators like Thomas Bergler have suggested that our church leaders, in an effort to reach boomers when they



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were young, developed an approach that gave in to a culture of youthfulness, without developing patterns for maturity and aging. As a result of the church's focus on youthfulness, the church became irrelevant to many boomers (and boomers became irrelevant to the church because they no longer fit the mold of youthfulness) when they were no longer young. The rise of the SBNRs (Spiritual but Not Religious), many of whom are boomers, is often cited as an example of what happens when maturity and spirituality are not emphasized with those who are reaching older adulthood (many without a roadmap for later life). The rise of the SBNRs also proves Bergler's contention that American Christianity has been "juvenilized" and that a path toward mature faith is rarely considered in our churches. Boomers, who are reaching the age of maturity and are seeking something with more depth, are sometimes ignored or written off. Unfortunately, this attitude is not unknown in The United Methodist Church. One senior pastor of a church with a growing targeted boomer ministry (see the article, "Pioneer Churches Hitting the Mark with Boomers") that has seen a significant increase of boomer professions of faith was asked pointedly by his district superintendent why the church was not showing a large increase in youth confirmations instead. Apparently, youth faith formation was the only thing that mattered in that district!

Interestingly enough, if the church really wants to reach millennials, it will be more successful in doing so if it reaches the baby boomer parents first. Statistics from the Brookings Institute bear this out

- 92% of all millennials (which the church believes are its future) have baby boomers as parents.<sup>1</sup>
- 34% of millennials depend upon their baby boomer parents for some form of financial support.<sup>2</sup>
- 61% of millennials in a Brookings Institute Study listed their parents as *the* major influence on their political and religious views.<sup>3</sup>

These statistics suggest that there is a strong relationship between boomers and their millennial children that could benefit the church in reaching future generations. The church needs to learn

how to reach the baby boomers first. The statistics also show that the boomer generation is indeed a linchpin generation that is important to the future of the church.

When you add in statistics about boomers who are already grandparents, the picture of boomers as a linchpin generation becomes even clearer. These statistics come from:

- 72% of boomers think being a grandparent is the single most important and satisfying thing in their life.<sup>4</sup>
- 63% of boomers say they can do a better job caring for grandchildren than they did caring for their children. 68% of boomers think that being grandparent brings them closer to their adult children.<sup>5</sup>
- 43% of grandparents are in their sixties and 37% are in their fifties, which makes 60% of all grandparents' boomers.<sup>6</sup>

Boomers are not just a part of the future of disciple making for the church. They are essential for the overall financial health of the church. Maintaining the church and growing its ministries requires substantial financial support. Here are some eye-opening statistics for church leaders about the importance of boomers for the financial health of the church:

- Boomers hold 70% of the disposable income in the United States and will continue to be the wealthiest generation in the United States until at least 2030.<sup>7</sup>
- Boomers are currently the majority of nonprofit donors and will be until around 2033. Boomer retirees are expected to donate about \$6.6 trillion in cash and \$1.4 trillion in volunteer services during the next twenty years.<sup>8</sup>
- Among boomers who donated to charities, 53% donated to religious or spiritual nonprofits in the last year. This was the largest portion of their contributions.<sup>9</sup>
- Boomers make better contributors to the church than do younger donors. They continue to give at a much higher rate than their younger counterparts. They are also more likely to increase their giving levels over time, and they are much more likely to make legacy gifts in their wills.<sup>10</sup>

Boomers already have the greatest potential to support the church in the future, so increasing the number of boomers who are a part of the church will most assuredly increase the support (financial and volunteer services) the church receives into the future. As a major influence on their children and grandchildren, new boomer disciples could have a major impact on church financial support for many years to come.

There are a few places where the church is beginning to reach out to boomers. When it has not, it has been because the church has lacked knowledge of the potential of boomers as new or renewed disciples or has lacked knowledge about how to reach out to boomers. This issue of the *S.A.G.E.* seeks to address both drawbacks. The article “Woodstock for the Church” discusses the movement to develop new models of ministry to reach boomers and to demonstrate the potential boomer ministry could have for the church. “Pioneer Churches Hitting the Mark with Boomers” showcases churches that already have targeted boomer ministry. “Losing My Religion” is about the SBNR or Spiritual but Not Religious and the Dones and Nones as a real opportunity for disciple making and faith formation. This issue of the *S.A.G.E.* also has an update from the Committee on Older Adult Ministries as it looks ahead to the next quadrennium.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> 15 Economic Facts about Millennials, White House Council of Economic Advisors, located at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/millennials\\_report.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/millennials_report.pdf) .

<sup>2</sup> USA TODAY/Bank of America Better Money Habits survey of 1,000 Millennials, 18-34, and 1,005 parents of Millennials. Part of the USA Today series Millennials and Money located on October 19, 2016 @. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2015/04/21/millennials-getting-help-from-parents/25812211/> .

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Article entitled Surprising Facts About Grandparents: How today’s grandparents are defying stereotypes. Found on October 19,



2016 at <http://www.grandparents.com/food-and-leisure/did-you-know/surprising-facts-about-grandparentsAmerican> .

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Baby Boomers Poised to give 8 Trillion, Maria Di Mento, appearing in the Chronicle of Philanthropy, Oct 22, 2015 located online at <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/Baby-Boomers-Poised-to-Give-8/233873> .

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



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# BABY BOOMERS AT A GLANCE

1. Baby boomers are (for the most part) the children of the “Greatest Generation,” (note there are variation about the birth years for each generation depending upon commentator) (Bump, 2014)
2. Boomers were born during the baby boom (or close to it) that occurred from 1946 to 1964. However, this generation was defined not by birth year, but by entry into adulthood in the 1960s, 70s, and 1980s – times of great upheaval and change.
3. Not all boomers are alike. Leading-edge boomers, who were born before 1955, tend to be idealistic. Late boomers or “generation Jones” boomers, born between 1956 and 1964, tend to be more performance-oriented. (Wikipedia citing William Strauss and Neil Howe, Generations).
4. Influenced by years of watching television, boomers are early adopters of technology and the greatest consumers of it.
5. Boomers learned not to trust those in authority, largely because of Vietnam and Watergate. Boomers avoid structure and prefer to do things their own way.
6. Boomers make up the largest generation ever born in the United States, with 78 million births (compared with 75.1 million millennials – their children). There are still about 74.9 million boomers living in the U.S. (Demographers such as the Pew Research center (Fry, 2016) now say boomers have been surpassed in numbers by millennials due to boomer deaths and to the large influx of millennial immigrants and by the tendency to expand the number of years of the millennial generation to 21.)
7. Ten thousand boomers reach retirement age each day (starting in 2011), but many are choosing to delay retirement because of financial considerations or because their identities are so closely tied with their careers.
8. While boomers have never been the generation most likely to attend church, the percentage of unchurched boomers has risen dramatically during the past twenty years, jumping up eighteen points! At 41 percent, boomers are now the generation most likely to be unchurched, surpassing the 39 percent level among baby busters (those born approximately from 1965 to 1980).
9. Many boomers fear getting old, and they tend to be youth-oriented. Advertisers targeting this generation rarely show actual boomers because many boomers consider themselves to be younger than their chronological age (about ten to fifteen years younger). Boomers loathe being called anything that suggests age (old, senior, elder, golden, and so on).
10. Boomers are idealistic and service-minded. They still want to change the world.
11. Boomers will undergo a second coming of age as they transition through retirement and are faced with issues of identity, independence, and intimacy.
12. Boomers are competitive, well-educated, and strategic in their thinking.

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Phillip Bump’s article, *Here Is When Each Generation Begins and Ends*, appeared in the Atlantic Magazine and can be located at <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/03/here-is-when-each-generation-begins-and-ends-according-to-facts/359589>

Richard Fry’s Pew Research Center article appears at the Pew website located at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers>

# FALL 2016 COMMITTEE ON OLDER ADULT MINISTRIES MEETING

The Committee on Older Adult Ministries (COAM) Interagency Task Force on Older Adult Ministry meet met in September 2016 (just before Boomerstock) in Nashville, Tennessee, for the final meeting of the quadrennium. This Book of Discipline-mandated group is tasked to lead The United Methodist Church in its ministry with older adults. With representatives from all twelve United Methodist church agencies, from each jurisdiction or central conference, and from the Council on Bishops, its work has been to urge the church to focus on issues relevant to those in the church who have reached the second half of life. The committee met in conjunction with Boomerstock, an event focused on the baby boom generation.

The theme of the fall meeting was “Back to the Future” to stress that the committee was looking forward and backward at the same time, evaluating work for the current four years and beginning to plan for the next four years. The meeting began with a reading of the committee’s mandate or purpose, then worship and Communion.

The first order of business was to hear evaluations from the standing committees in their work in the areas of intergenerational ministry, aging in poverty, and the new seniors or baby boomers. Each committee had four framing questions for evaluations: (1) What from the original goals was completed successfully? (2) What remained unfinished and why? (3) What could have been improved or done differently. (4) Should the focus area continue? The standing committees then made reports to the whole committee for discussion and suggestions. Themes emerged for the committee’s ongoing work; for example, the church has been focused on youth, but there is still an opportunity to claim a place for older adults and their needs in the church.

The second order of business was to set the stage for the next four years. The COAM discussed areas that the new committee should focus on

during the next quadrennium. Chairperson Marvin Cropsey had finished his term as chair, and new leaders were elected. Sarah Johnson of Wespeth (formerly General Board of Pensions) was elected as chair, and Lynn Swedberg of Disability Ministry was elected as vice chair. It was agreed that the COAM will work to focus the church globally and will serve four different generations of older adults. The COAM agreed to undertake the new areas of wellness, dementia, generational conflict, legacy, older-adult evangelism, and faithful dying. A new secretary will be selected at a later date. A tentative spring organizational meeting date was agreed upon of March 8-10, 2016

The third order of business was to receive reports from member agencies. The focus of this meeting was to discover new areas of collaboration. Each member was asked to think of the parts of his/ her agency that could be involved in older-adult ministry in cooperation with other agencies. Committee members explored the websites of each agency and developed a list of about a dozen possible direct collaborations among agencies, many not requiring full COAM’s approval. Members of the COAM were then tasked with continuing to explore possibilities.

The final piece of business was a celebration of the last four years together. A lot had changed since that first March of 2013 meeting: a new director had come on board; Dr. Richard Gentzler had retired; different committee members had retired, passed away, or stepped down.

A luncheon was held honoring all members of the committee, especially those whose service had ended or was wrapping up. Departing members were presented a plaque highlighting their service to the church. Each member present was given an opportunity to reminisce about the past four years of change on this committee. Dr. Gentzler also spoke about his continued work in older-adult ministry.



Photo credit: Aquilino Javier

## BOOMERSTOCK: 3 DAYS THAT CHANGED A GENERATION

Boomerstock, which took place in Nashville, Tennessee, September 28-October 1, was more than two years in the making. If early reviews are an indication of success, the event struck a chord with participants and really captured the imaginations of these seasoned conference attendees. Participants report that as a result of the event, they have begun to comprehend the opportunities for disciple making that boomers present their churches.

From the germination of the initial idea for this event, the driving force behind Boomerstock was to do something different which the church had never before attempted: to learn from experts outside the church about how to engage with the baby boomer generation, which – for the most part – has remained outside the church.

A year into the planning process, the design team was trying to come up with a name for the event, something which would speak to who Boomers are and their potential importance for the church's revitalization efforts. None of our possible names fit. The assistance of a marketing professional

to help us develop a name, logo, and title. This marketing consultant asked one simple question that framed the selection of the name and set the tone for the event. He asked, "What is the most iconic image from the 1960s when boomers were formed as young adults?" "The answer was Woodstock," so the name for the event became Boomerstock.

As we explored the Boomerstock theme, we were amazed about how well it resembled the original Woodstock. Like Woodstock, Boomerstock came to exist because of a problem; the problem Woodstock addressed was a very unpopular Vietnam War. The problem Boomerstock addressed was that our church had lost the ability to reach and minister to a generation which had largely left the church. Just as Woodstock became a movement which touched more than those who were in attendance, the hope of Boomerstock is it will become a permanent movement to bring boomers back to the church. Some Historians credit Woodstock with bringing an end to the Vietnam War. Boomerstock planners are hopeful in the future, Boomerstock will be credited with revitalizing the faith of the Boomer generation.

Participants at Boomerstock say that the excellent presenters were among the highlights of the event. Our seven presenters represented the best, visionary perspectives in their fields of focus, and they were intrigued about helping the church reach baby boomers. Almost every participant commented about how accessible the presenters were during the event, how they came for the whole event and stayed until the end, ate meals with participants, listened to their stories and challenges, offered their networks of contacts to them, and then creatively asked questions during breakout sessions, panel discussions, and book signings.

Brent Green, author of *Marketing to Leading-Edge Baby Boomers* and *Generation Reinvention*, talked about branding and market segmentation versus universal marketing, and he inspired participants to think of the individuals they are trying to reach. Rick Moody, who is retired as Vice President and Director of Academic Affairs for AARP, focused his presentation on happiness and calling, which, he

says, is discovered through service. Moody says the church can help boomers redefine themselves through service opportunities. Moody also offered a dream interpretation workshop, which was well-received.

Carol Orsborn, editor-in-chief of *Fierce with Age: The Digest of Boomer Wisdom, Inspiration, and Spirituality*, and author of 21 books written for and about boomers, discussed a woman's perspective on being a boomer. She talked about opportunities for engaging with boomers by assisting them with planning for retirement, accepting aging, and encouraging them to continue to have meaning and purpose in their lives.

Vance Ross, Director of Annual Conference Relations for Vital Congregations at Discipleship Ministries, talked about building a utopian community, which many boomers had devoted themselves to doing as young people. Dr. Ross talked about how the church can grow past divisions of race to offer a diverse community. He offered a unique, first-person perspective of being an African-American baby boomer, which has been under-documented and under-researched.

Craig Miller, Director of Congregational Development for Discipleship Ministries, offered historical and developmental insights into boomers' concepts of spirituality and described how those concepts have affected them as they have continued through their lifespans. Craig also offered the kinds of assistance boomers will need and seek as they pass into the last quarter of life.

Linda Mercadante, author of *Bloomfield Avenue: A Jewish-Catholic Jersey Girl's Spiritual Journey*, which is a first person account of how she left behind her own Spiritual But Not Religious (SBNR) approach to the church, and *Belief Without Borders*, which was based upon interviews with over ten thousand Spiritual But Not Religious boomers made a presentation about how to re-engage with these boomers. She described ways to involve the SBNR boomers in real, authentic, spiritual practices and community.

One of the best presentations was one done remotely by Tom Bandy of MissionInsite. He discussed what big data can teach us about

the lifestyle choices of many boomers and how this affects what they are looking for in a faith community. Baby boomers who are part of the church are obviously different from those who are outside of the church, so understanding the outside boomers and their differences is crucial for start-up boomer ministries. MissionInsite has identified sixteen different types of boomers and has noted which types merge easily within groups and even with other generations. (Note: Most annual conferences have access to the MissionInsite – <http://missioninsite.com/> – materials. Video training is available through [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), and MissionInsite has a downloadable pdf manual.)

Boomerstock was not just hard work and no play. Part of what made the event so effective was the use of other elements, designed to be true to the spirit of the original Woodstock. Boomerstock began with a time of sharing, which was modeled after Speed Dating Formats sometimes offered by matchmaking services. Participants were seated in rows across from each other, given about 5 minutes each to share a little about themselves, and then they moved down to the next chair to network with the next participant. This time of networking was done so that participants could develop discussion partners who it was hoped would later become a network with which to collaborate in developing boomer ministry. On Friday night, Boomerstock featured a concert by the What? band. (Woodstock had the Who; Boomerstock had the What?). This local band played 17 pieces that had been performed at Woodstock. Another feature for the evening was a Woodstock costume contest with Boomerstock T-Shirts given as prizes.

Boomerstock has focused the church's attention on how older-adult ministry is changing with baby boomers entering retirement. It has also called attention to the great opportunity for claiming new disciples by reaching this largely unchurched group. Development has started on a Boomer Ministry Toolkit, a Boomer Ministry Coaching Network, and a Boomer Ministry Incubator; and plans are being made for Boomerstock 2. Stay tuned.

# Listening and Hearing May Go A Long Way

Listening and hearing may go a long way in our attempts to reach the spiritual but not religious boomers, according to Dr. Linda Mercadante *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious*. Mercadante, who teaches theology at the Methodist Theological School of Ohio, once considered herself in that category. Through interviews, she has chronicled the stories of baby boomers who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious (SBNR) by listening carefully to their stories to understand why they chose not to express their spirituality and hunger for God within a church community. She has concluded that the act of listening will go a long way toward opening dialogue with the SBNRs and will open up the possibility of inviting them into the church.

Several common elements found in the interviews with the SBNR boomers conducted by Dr. Mercadante stand out. Since many boomers were encouraged as children to do their own thinking, they often developed a highly individualistic approach to life and faith. They grew up in a time of unprecedented choices and were exposed to a number of different cultures, so they became accustomed to picking and choosing from different sources for their spirituality. Often these SBNR boomers sampled from a number of faith communities and practices and preferred this approach to receiving spiritual nurture from a one-stop-shop like the church. Finally, some boomers came into adulthood in a time when young people believed they could not trust anyone in authority and that included pastors and other church leaders. These SBNR boomers chose to make themselves the sole authority for spirituality rather than to trust the church or tradition.

There are a number of myths about SBNRs that sometimes get in the way of the church's

efforts to engage with boomers. One myth is that SBNR boomers are people who have had a bad experience with the church and that if the rift with the church is repaired, then the SBNRs will become faithful church members like everyone else. The reality is that many SBNRs have reported having good experiences with churches, but they still do not desire or trust what the church offers.

A second myth is that the SBNR boomers have little to offer the church, while the church can offer the SBNRs what they most need. As a part of this myth, churches feel the SBNRs need to change—not the church or the church's approach. Churches that approach the SBNRs with the idea of mutual sharing have discovered some success in engaging with these boomers. Other churches have begun to realize benefits from accommodating the SBNRs. In trying to attract SBNRs with true, authentic spiritual practices, some churches have been moved to seek both greater authenticity and increased dedication in their own spiritual practices.

A third and final common myth about the SBNRs is that this group will never be happy and stable in their church membership or attendance because if they were going to be happy, they would not have left the church in the first place. Lots of former SBNRs have discovered they can find meaningful support of their faith in the church and have rewarded the church by becoming its most ardent supporters. They do so when they have found opportunities to express their spirituality without judgement or condemnation.

The road to engagement with the spiritual but not religious may not be easy, and churches will have to learn a different tactic if they want to engage these boomers. However, the final experience of trying to listen, understand, and engage them on their terms can be rewarding for both the church and SBNR boomers.

# PIONEER CHURCHES:

## CHURCHES WITH A VISION FOR BOOMER MINISTRY

Amy Hanson, author of *Baby Boomers and Beyond: Tapping the Ministry Talents and Passions of Adults over Fifty* (published in 2010), offers examples of targeted ministries designed to reach baby boomers. In this important book, Hanson discusses the unprecedented opportunities the church has for reaching boomers as they grow into older adulthood. Hanson is clear that previous models of ministry with older adults will have to change substantially to be effective because baby boomers are different. Many examples that Hanson cites as novel approaches for attracting and engaging boomers come from nondenominational churches.

Two of Hanson's examples, however, were from United Methodist churches: Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church in Birmingham, AL, led by Rev. Jim Frazier and Chapelwood United Methodist Church in Houston, TX, led by Rev. Scott Endress. These two churches already had effective older adult ministry programs when they decided they needed something different to reach the emerging older adults or boomers.

These two churches took different approaches to the challenge, but discovered one commonality that guided them: they could not simply add boomers into the existing older-adult ministry and expect the ministry to be successful. They discovered that boomer ministry had to be built from the ground up.

Chapelwood's approach was to form programs around the needs and interests of boomers, such as service to the community. Vestavia Hills' approach was to emphasize small-group social and fellowship events. Both churches were pioneers exploring uncharted territory, and they had to learn through trial and error. Both churches learned basic principles of boomer ministry and spread the word about what was possible.

Other pioneering churches have begun to develop their own boomer ministries.

### BOOMER MINISTRIES CATALOG

The Office on Aging at Discipleship Ministries is developing a catalog of United Methodist churches that are engaged in targeted boomer ministries.

We are researching conference newsletters along with conference and church websites to obtain the information. We issued a challenge to each annual conference represented at Boomerstock to identify ten churches within the conference that are interested in starting new

boomer ministries. The Office on Aging will do follow-up research with the churches listed in the catalog, even as the catalog expands to evaluate what works and doesn't work (and why) in targeted boomer ministry.

Some churches identified as pioneer churches in our boomer ministry catalog, or churches that sent representatives to Boomerstock, like Cary First UMC (North Carolina Conference), Topeka First United Methodist Church (Great Plains Conference), or Clarkston UMC (Detroit/Michigan Conference)—will be invited to become boomer ministry teaching churches. The catalog of targeted boomer ministries will be an important tool for the church in creating new boomer ministry models. We hope this catalog will help measure how effective the church is at providing boomers with spiritual care and ministry.

There are currently 50 churches which list a targeted boomer ministry at their websites. If you are aware of others, please contact either Lisa Edge at [ledge@umcdiscipleship.org](mailto:ledge@umcdiscipleship.org) or Will Randolph at [wrandolph@umcdiscipleship.org](mailto:wrandolph@umcdiscipleship.org) and we will add them to the catalog.





## CHANGING BEFORE OUR EYES

Older adult ministry is changing right before our eyes, because those who will be served by this ministry are changing. It is essential that the church be ready to adapt to this shifting ministry landscape. A redefining of the methodology of traditional older adult ministry will be required as the current generation of older adults is replaced by the baby boomers. What has worked in the past simply will not work with aging baby boomers. Baby boomers are radically different from previous generations of older adults. However, the aging process will catch up to baby boomers in ways they are not prepared to face. Aging will transform them. An essential question for church leaders is, “In what ways will baby boomers change aging as we know it, and in what ways will the aging process change baby boomers?”

The church tried to anticipate and meet the needs of boomers when they were younger, and it did so with mixed results. If the church wants to minister better to this generation or even to continue to minister to this generation, it will have to improve its understanding of both boomers and aging. It will have to do so in part without the benefit of already having them as a captive audience since many have left the ranks of the church and become unchurched or inactive and under-churched. Still others now identify themselves as having none for religious affiliation, or done with religion altogether at the same time they claim to be Spiritual (see *Listening May Go a Long Way*, pg. 8).

Baby boomers will probably live much longer than did their parents and grandparents, so the church will have to prepare for ministering with this generation for a substantially longer period of time. The church catered to boomers when they were the youth in the church. In fact, a whole new class of ministry specialists – youth ministers – emerged to assist boomers in growing into faithful adulthood. As boomers age, the need for specialists in boomer older adult ministry may emerge. Already, some churches are beginning to hire second-half-of-life or 50-plus ministers to help them design and develop targeted boomer ministry. Retirement mentors, coaches, and academies are now striving to meet boomer needs.

Boomers want to remain active and youthful. Some seem to be frozen in place, not wanting to grow up. Few see themselves as old. Boomers refuse to be called elders, seniors, mature, or golden anything. Boomers have seen an incredible array of technological advances, and they have been offered options over their lifetimes, so they have become used to having choices. Boomer ministry will need to offer a way to customize choices from a number of options. Quality and options will be the watchwords for churches in everything from worship to travel to learning experiences.

Boomers have been very performance-oriented, with much of their career lives spent squeezing the most out of every moment. Many are now treating

retirement as a competitive performance and are trying to squeeze as much as possible into short periods of time. Some boomers report that they are busier in retirement than when they worked. Those who are not busy have reported boredom, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with retirement. Older adult ministry specialists will have to address the transition from more-active to less-active lifestyles as boomer bodies, age and break down. Values clarification work could help boomers avoid becoming so competitive with their retirement schedules or bucket lists. Boomers who identified so closely with their work and careers will need help discovering who they are outside of work.

Aging boomers will eventually have to learn to cope with the loss of friends, independence, health, and wealth, so issues such as independence, caregiving, transportation, coping, mental health, suicide prevention, and addiction and recovery are significant needs of boomers. Already, we are seeing a rise in the levels of need, and many secular services that address these needs are overwhelmed. Finally, the aging process will mean that boomers begin to face the loss of loved ones and friends who pass away. As they face these losses, boomers will have questions concerning death and dying, vulnerability and control, legacy and benevolence. Such questions offer the church an opportunity to assist boomers in death preparation, faith formation, and legacy leaving.

The second-half-of-life ministry or retirement ministry will surely change with boomers, even though the purpose is still the same –to

make disciples and help these disciples grow into faithfulness. However, boomers represent an enormous opportunity for the church (see the article entitled Baby Boomers, Linchpin Generation). Some builder generation issues like caregiving, dementia, and grand-parenting will continue to be an older adult ministry focus, since Boomers are often sandwiched between the care of both aging parents and young grandchildren, but the models for boomer ministry are still being built (see the article entitled Boomerstock: Three Days That Changed a Generation and the article entitled Pioneer Churches: Churches with a Vision for Boomer Ministry).

The church in our recent past admittedly has not been effective in making disciples of boomers as they advanced through earlier life stages. This may be the final opportunity to reach many of those boomers. However, in reaching out to boomers, the church should not abandon its commitment to the generations it already serves. Indeed, one of those generations is made up of the parents of boomers, and boomers represent a portion of their care as they become more dependent and frail. Boomers will also represent the legacy for these generations, and without boomers, the heritage of the church suffers. Eventually, boomers will be followed by the younger generations into older adulthood, so understanding the dynamics of boomer culture becomes a great foundation for the required adaptations to accommodate future generation x and millennial older adults.

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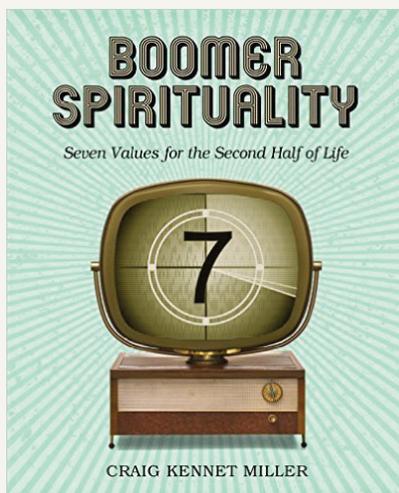
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## BOOMER SPIRITUALITY: SEVEN VALUES FOR SECOND HALF OF LIFE

by Craig Kennet Miller

As the boomer generation navigates dramatic change as it ages, it will be informed by a unique spirituality that was forged in the tumultuous years of the 1960s and 1970s. If you are a boomer, you are sure to be reminded of the events and experiences that had an impact on you when you were young. If you are the child of a boomer, this book will help you understand why your parents act the way they do. If you are creating ministry for this generation, this will be your guide to the way boomers view the world and look toward the future.

For more information, visit [www.boomerspirituality.org](http://www.boomerspirituality.org).