

ISSUES

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The Coming Age Wave: Are We Ready?



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ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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reflections

The day I turned 40 my daughter said: "Dad, you are old, but when you get to be 50 you will be really old." As this edition of *Issues* goes to print, I find myself on the eve of being really old. But I'm not ready for the black balloon parties and over-the-hill jokes others have had to suffer through on the occasion of achieving the half-century milestone!

The title of this edition asks a profound question: Are we ready? Yet the reality of the Age Wave is that ready or not it is here! The articles contained herein are filled with hope, vision and wisdom. They articulate practical advice rooted in theological truth that provides a scaffold to help us be ready and responsive to the reality of the aging world around us. The Age Wave presents untold challenges, but more importantly, unrealized opportunities for the Church of Jesus Christ to proclaim and live out the Great Commission here in the United States and the world.

Our God is a God of *chronos* and *kairos*. As the articles by Shirley and Marvin Bergman and Cliff Pederson articulate, at just the right time (*kairos*) God has given us an enormous people group to reach for the sake of the Gospel and to use in reaching with the Gospel! Now is not a time (*chronos*) to despair because of the challenges of serving and being in ministry with persons who constitute the Age Wave. It is a time (*chronos* and *kairos*) to thank God for the marvelous resource of people He has given and to enthusiastically embrace the exciting opportunities for service and ministry before us.

The words of *The Church of Christ in Every Age* by Fred Pratt Green remind us that the Lord's work is never done until He has called His servants to their heavenly home.

The church of Christ in every age,
beset by change but Spirit-led,
must claim and test its heritage
and keep on rising from the dead.

We have no mission but to serve
in full obedience to our Lord:
to care for all, without reserve,
and spread his liberating word.

With that conviction may we serve in the age, with every age and at the age we are until our temporal age gives way to the eternal age sealed in our Baptism and consummated in our deaths.

Brian L. Friedrich, President

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Age-Wave Concerns

Periodically, when I tell my peers that I am studying gerontology, they ask why. At that point, I usually explain my ideas about the rectangularization of the age curve or the social and personal issues in aging. Usually, they tell me that they try not to think about it, and I sigh.

I am concerned about the age wave. As I ponder my potential as a caretaker of the Boomer Generation and consider the future of the children of my generation, I worry. I worry a lot. Not about the aging adults personally; they are good people. I know that. The majority of older adults are vital and active. The Baby Boomers and the silent generation constitute an important work force, a critical network of volunteers and the backbone of the contemporary church. These gifted individuals offer experience, wisdom and resources that make the stereotypes of frail, invalid older adults seem almost ridiculous.

Still, for all the promise that aging people give for the church and society, I feel that we are naïve if we ignore the issues of the age wave. One need only listen to the news for a few hours to see a painful picture.

The age wave will change the health care system as we know it. It appears that diseases such as dementia of the Alzheimer's type and coronary illness increase in frequency with each year of age and with each generation. The potential for depression increases with age as the stressors of decreased income, loss of productivity, caregiving, grief and chronic pain come together in later years of life. In short, the longer people live, the more potential that they will have chronic health issues and/or need extended care. Meanwhile, health care costs increase eight to 14 percent annually, and increasing numbers of individuals turn to Medicare and/or Medicaid to cover these expenses. (Currently, older adults, although constituting only 25 percent of those enrolled in Medicaid,

use 75 percent of the money provided through Medicaid.) With greater numbers of elders, there will be a greater draw on these systems. Potentially, the system will be overwhelmed, and all generations will struggle with no safety net and little later life care (cf. Haber, 2003).

Meanwhile, our consumption-based society has not and is not saving for later life. People of all ages are spending more than they are earning (cf. ABC News, May 23, 2006). Few people have savings to support themselves for several months of unemployment or disability, say nothing of close to 20 years of retirement. Poverty, already high in prevalence among the oldest in our population, may become the hallmark of aging.

To add to the concerns, there are few promising assistance programs on the horizon. In the United States over the last five years, demands for costly care have met with an instable federal budget. Governmental programs to provide Social Security and health care to millions of Americans need substantial revision or they will dissolve. Advocates of the aging population and political action groups demand more, not less, governmental programming while reform movements continue to fail. Private industry has scaled back pension programs and life-time medical packages in efforts to remain financially stable. Meanwhile, private aid agencies and faith-based programs are stressed beyond their abilities and their resources.

The needs sitting before the church and society are overwhelming, and the problems are only exacerbated by fear, avoidance and non-action.

As a church and as individuals—both young and old—we need to educate ourselves and prepare to face these challenges. We need to develop programs to promote successful aging and community wellness in order to

decrease the demand for medical and mental health care. We need to understand public policy and its impact on older adults as well as younger persons for whom social systems may be drastically different in the future. We need to honestly assess our personal financial strategies and plans based on the assumption that select support systems may not exist in the future. We need to educate more professionals in business, ministry and education about the needs of an aging population as well as the possibilities for ministry to and with older adults. Finally, we need to pray. We need to pray that God works in each of us to become good stewards of our bodies and our resources. We need to pray that God brings forth leaders in our world, our nation and our church that will act responsibly on this issue. Finally, we need to ask God's strength in facing challenges and promises.

The age wave will change the world forever. If we approach it wisely and honestly, that change will bring with it great blessing. God grant that it be so.

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The "Age Wave" and the Church

Several years ago, Ken Dychtwald, an expert on aging, labeled the upsurge in the post-WW II birth rate the "Age Wave." That appellation has become well known and widespread in its usage, a handy descriptive term for a demographic phenomenon.

The extremely interesting thing about "Age Wave" is the powerful and active image that it evokes. The sea shows its power as waves toss large and heavy ships around. With no land in sight and in the darkness of a stormy sea, seafarers face a sinister sea in the raging of its waves. However, closer to shore the waves become enjoyable, ridden by surfers as they flatten out and calmly end as bubbles on the sandy beach. People enjoy surfing as great recreation and in competition.

Applying "Age Wave" metaphorically for the purposes of the mission and ministry of the church, the wave represents the "Baby Boomers" who have reached their 60s, already retired or planning retirement or determined never to retire. While the term arose from the large number of Baby Boomers and a concern for the ripple effect of the size of their segment of society, the term could also refer to any age group; smaller waves also have a rippling effect. Furthermore, each wave is like and unlike other age waves.

The surfers include American society, borne along by this numerically influential wave, and the Lutheran Church, neither of which can reduce the size of the wave or successfully resist it.

The church needs to recognize the Age Wave for what it is. The Boomers are here at a great and important stage in their lives. They are or can be the church of today and tomorrow, of significance in mission and ministry equal to children and youth, as well as older adults. With their sensitivity to individual rights and equality, they can help the church fulfill honestly her commitment to all age groups, from the cradle to the grave.

The church, in turn, has a lot to give to Boomers. The Gospel is the life-giving, person-affirming truth from God the Father through Jesus Christ the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit fit for all ages, regardless of numbers, intelligence, material assets, race, gender, nationality. The church preaches, teaches and shares the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation for all who receive its message in faith.

In the many ways available to the church for spreading the Gospel—sermons, Bible classes, publications, activities—the church needs to be age specific. Congregations have "Children Talks." Sermons, which are usually "Adult Talks," should include specific examples and directives for adult age groups. Bible class topics can reflect the needs and interests of older adults.

The Gospel is the only genuine and effective "anti-aging" agent. Judging from the commercial world, aging is a big fear (and a gold mine for the manufacturers of creams and tonics) of people, especially among those nearing retirement (Boomers) and the upper years. With promises of the "abundant life" through Jesus Christ, the Gospel puts aging into a proper perspective for hopefulness, usefulness, purpose and joy throughout life.

The church can help Boomers and other older adults by giving attention to aging as a biological phenomenon. Bio-gerontology reports on what has been observed scientifically regarding aging in humans can foster more realism and acceptance of aging. Disregarding science can miss many blessings found on God's good earth; applying it in the light of the Gospel can put the church into a position of leadership, rather than reactive catch-up.

Congregations can also put a happy face on aging, blessing, speaking well of the passing of years for the good they have brought. They can be careful not to reinforce stereotypes of older persons, but show love and respect

for elders and provide facilities that meet the needs of older adults—bright lights, not-so-loud organs, working PA systems, to name a few items.

The upper years can be among the best of a person's life. Some complain that it's awful to grow old, referring mainly to the physical and mental deteriorations that begin to occur when one reaches his or her 50s and 60s. Yet, each age has its problems. Adolescence is not without its problems, as evidenced by a high rate of accidental and self-inflicted death. Many adults have a tough time in mid-life crises. However, years of experience can result in wisdom, contentment and perspicuity of purpose and meaning.

The Age Wave can be a great thrill for the church, as well as a challenge and an opportunity.

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I Have a Dream

When I began my ministry in the early 1950s, congregations were experiencing an avalanche of children. Gradually they were "crowding 12 and then some." Guess what happened? Many congregations began appointing a youth ministry board; some added a youth pastor or youth director to their staff. Since then, congregations have been enlarging and enhancing their youth ministries. Today eight out of ten congregations have a professional church worker or a volunteer leading a youth ministry.

Today this same group of people is "crowding 50 and then some." Yes, the Baby Boomers have been celebrating their 50th birthdays since 1996. In 2011, they will start turning 65 and usher in the Senior Boom. With life expectancy growing and the older population mushrooming, congregations need to chart a course to meet the opportunities, challenges and specific needs of older adults. No longer are we dealing with mere-aging, but mass-aging.

To be sure, today's congregations do have an older adult ministry. But do they have plans to promote a ministry that will enhance and enlarge such ministry in the midst of a dynamic paradigm shift from a youth dominated culture to an elder culture? Just think—older adults will be spending 1/3 of their life in retirement, and most will be healthy older people. Older adults are not homogeneous, and they cannot be viewed as being alike. One uniform standardized ministry will not meet all needs.

Cliff Pederson, President of Church Resources, talks about:

Independent-Able: They walk, drive, shop, travel, work, conduct daily activities.

Transition-Able: They are folks who are beginning to experience normal limitations often associated with aging. They may choose not to drive at night or walk up multiple flights of stairs.

Dependent-Able: They are more restrictive and have limited functions because of physical conditions which are often directly related to aging. They are often the frail-old in our midst.

I like to view older adults as the Go-Gos, the Slow-Gos, and the No-Gos. What is this saying to congregations? They need to develop a ministry by the Go-Gos, a ministry with the Slow-Gos, and a ministry to the No-Gos. With such an approach, you help older adults recognize that they may retire from their daily occupations, but

they do not retire from life in the Kingdom of God. Unless congregations tap into and intentionally identify these older members, they often become "hidden treasures" rather than a rich resource for ministry.

I believe that congregations have a calling to help older adults deal with life's questions:

- Who am I?
- Whose am I?
- Why am I here?
- Why is God giving me these extra years of living?
- What should I be doing with this amazing gift of extended life?
- How can I make a significant difference in the lives of others—family, friends, neighbors, fellow believers—in what I say and do?

Pastors and professional church workers and lay leaders have a calling to answer seven questions to develop a new vision for life in the congregations of the 21st century.

1. How do we raise the awareness to accept the challenges facing an older population?
2. How do we meet the opportunities in multigenerational families?
3. How do we help older adults model and pass on the faith of those who follow?
4. How do we become advocates for the needs of older adults?
5. How do we look to the future while remembering the past?
6. How do we use the skills and wisdom of older adults for involvement in meaningful ministries?
7. How do we help older adults ask for help when they must depend on others?

In 1991, I retired as pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Kirkwood, Missouri. I entered upon a whole new phase of ministry being "repositioned" as an advocate of older adult ministry in the life of the church and the community. I have met with older adults. I have conducted seminars and workshops. I have participated in Lutherhostels. I am editing a quarterly newsletter, "Engaging the Aging." I am serving as Director of Church Relations, Lutheran Senior Services of Missouri and Illinois.

These years have brought me many blessings. Today I have a dream. I want to share the dream with you:

- The day when more and more congregations will help older adults live their baptismal covenant as active participants in the Kingdom of God.
- The day when congregations practice an attitude that says older adult ministry is intentional, inclusive, adequately staffed, resourceful, and builds and shares faith.
- The day when congregations have a high priority for evangelism among older adults.
- The day when congregations move from a membership mentality to one which encourages discipleship among older adults.
- The day when congregations do not leave an intergenerational ministry to chance.
- The day when our seminaries and universities train students to recognize the spiritual strengths and services of older adults.
- The day when more and more older adults listen to the answer to the question, "Hey, God, what about these extra years of living?" And respond to God's call to age gracefully and gratefully to the glory of God as one of His servants.

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CLIFF PEDERSON

The Age Tsunami and 21st Century Congregations

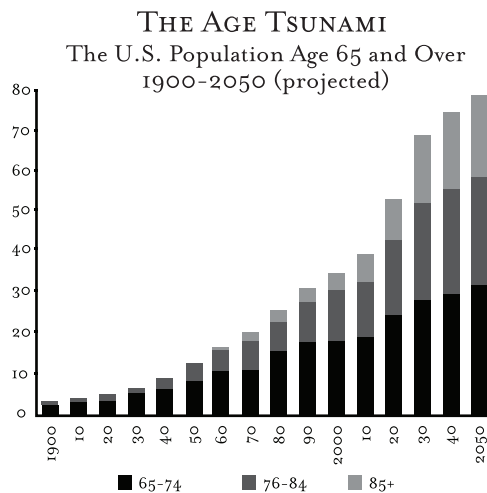


• Illustration by Jacob Cooper •

ISSUES

The Challenge of Mass Aging in our Nation

The challenge of the 21st century is not *mere-aging*—it is *mass-aging*. Never before in human history have we experienced so many older adults over the age of 65. The challenges and opportunities associated with mass-aging are unlike any demographic change this country has ever known, unlike any political or social movement in any generation and unlike any government reform ever experienced.



In four years, by 2010, there will be 39 million Americans 65 or older. In 2030, that number will increase to over 70 million people. This represents an unprecedented 77 percent growth rate, with one of every five Americans over the age of 65. By 2050 the 65+ cohort will exceed 80 million, and 33 percent of all individuals over 65 will actually be over 85. That is what we call “mass-aging.”

The world has never experienced *mass-aging* before the 21st century. It is not that we are unacquainted with the effects of aging, but we have never before confronted them in such large numbers. Speaking at the 45th annual meeting of the American Society on Aging, Dr. Gary Andrews (d. May 2006), former President of the International Association of

Gerontological Societies said,

“The world population increases with a net addition of nearly one million people age 60 or older every month. Additionally, two-thirds of all people in human history who have ever reached age 65 or older, and three-fourths of all people in human history who have ever reached age 75 or older are living today.”

That is the difference between mere-aging and mass-aging.

The Challenge of Mass Aging in our Church

The Church is leading the mass-aging demographic. In 2001 the Lilly Foundation funded a “U. S. Congregational Life Survey” (www.uscongregations.org) that identified the median age of participating main-line Protestant churches. The study collected data for average worship service attendees between the ages of 15 and 99. Participating in the study, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reported that the median age (the 50th percentile) of the ELCA was 54, fourteen years older than the median age of the U. S. population of the same age cohort. In 2001 one-half of all confirmed ELCA Lutherans were over the age of 54, and by 2007 the median age will have increased.

Although the LCMS did not participate in this median age study, it is my working hypothesis that the median age within the LCMS may be slightly older than the ELCA. This hypothesis is based on the LCMS having a smaller national membership than the ELCA, and therefore less likely to represent the national median.

Consequently, what the church will face in the first half of the 21st century is not an *age wave* but an *age tsunami*, and we are already well on the way. *Wave* language conjures up images of delightful, welcoming days at the beach. Mass-aging is a wave of a different intensity. Mass-aging is a tsunami that threatens every structure in society ... and for the most part,

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the institutions of the church-at-large, both modality and sodality, are in denial.

However, the aging tsunami brings with it marvelous ministry opportunities. While the aging profile of every congregation is different, one ministry decision gets better every 10.9 seconds. This is true for all congregations independent of size and location—mega-church, large, small, inner-city, suburban, small town or rural. Every 10.9 seconds another American turns 60. The effect of mass-aging provides every congregation with an unprecedented ministry opportunity within the fastest growing demographic group our nation has ever known.

How will the Church respond to this opportunity? What difference will this make for your congregation? How can you begin to prepare for this tsunami of mass-aging? How will the coming retirement of Baby Boomers change the demographics and societal structures in our country? What will be the impact of large numbers of older persons on health and social services? What does research tell us about key needs, expectations and potential service of retiring Lutheran Boomers? How will retiring Boomers impact Lutheran congregations?

A God-Centered Hypothesis is Necessary for a God-Centered Solution

All responses to the challenges of mass-aging will depend on a proffered explanation for the phenomenon. This premise or supposition will offer an answer to the “why” questions: “Why did this happen? Why are our Lutheran congregations aging? Why are we 14 years older than the general population? Why is there a *sea of gray* when we look out over our worshipping communities?”

I will summarize three popular hypotheses. Perhaps the most common hypothesis within the church is the *sociological* hypothesis. We hypothesize that the reason our congregations are aging is that we have not been effective in outreach programs to youth and families with young children. If this becomes our primary working assumption, then the challenges of

mass-aging will be resolved by refocusing our efforts on youth ministry. The sociological hypothesis sees aging as a problem and greater numbers of *youth* as the solution.

Another church-based hypothesis that addresses the “why” questions of mass-aging is *cultural*. The cultural analysts point out that the Lutheran Church is an immigrant church, a Reformation Church, a church with liturgical form. We are reminded that we are now in the 21st century and not the 16th century, the organ is not a contemporary musical instrument, and our old forms are not attracting younger, more contemporary and post-modern people. The cultural hypothesis sees aging as the natural consequence of an administrative time-warp that resists change.

A third hypothesis is predominant within the secular community. I call it *hypothesis free*. It avoids the “why” questions altogether and offers a *non-analytical capitulation* to demographic and statistical realities. This is the primary hypothesis of the National Council on Aging, American Society on Aging, the Area Associations on Aging, AARP and leading age-wave thinkers like Ken Dychwald. When adopted within the church, *hypothesis free* offers a Jack Webb approach: “Only the facts ... only the facts.” [N.B. If you do not understand this reference to Jack Webb, ask someone over 60.]

However, the sociological, cultural and hypothesis free approaches all fail to take the sovereignty of God and the love of Christ into consideration. Is God still in charge of his church? Is the aging of the church part of God’s plan seen in the Great Commission? If Christ remains sovereign over the winds and waves and migrations of peoples, then he is also sovereign over the aging of his bride. To remove the sovereign and gracious God from our hypothesis will effectively remove him from our solutions. But if a God of mercy is sovereign over the aging of his church, then the sociological and cultural analysts are wrong ... aging becomes God’s solution and not our problem.

So let’s come back to the questions we asked at the beginning of this section. Why are our Lutheran congregations aging? Why are we 14 years older than the general population? Why

is there a *sea of gray* when we look out over our worshipping communities? Is this just bad luck, the result of 50 years of youth ministry failure, or the result of an administrative and worship-style time-warp? I believe the answer is "No," and that in his sovereignty and love God is creating an aging church to reach an aging population. The question is, "Are we willing to be an older church for the purpose and glory of God's mission?"

What Challenges Face Aging Congregations in the 21st Century?

The tsunami of mass-aging will bring many complex challenges ... too many to delineate in any one article. However, I will briefly mention nine basic challenges that have emerged from our research.

In providing this list I wish to make two disclaimers. First, there is no prioritization intended in the listing order. Number one is not the most important and number nine is not the least important. Second, some readers may find it helpful to subdivide these challenges into "faith based" and "functional based." This subdivision may also be helpful providing that we remember that all functional challenges have faith components and vice versa.

1. The challenge of diversity in ministry structures and models.

Congregations need to recognize that ministry among older adults is not homogeneous. Just as there is diversity in our youth programs (early childhood, grade school, junior high, confirmation, senior high, college), so there is equal diversity among older adults. This is true for ministry among both Baby Boomers and the 65+ groups. Congregations that want to increase ministry among older adults need to consider a variety of programs designed to reach the diverse groups and needs among their pre-retirement Baby Boomers and retirement age members. There is great diversity within the Baby Boomer cohort. Consider, for example, that if a person was born in 1946, married early and had a child at eighteen ... then the parent and child are

both Baby Boomers. One program will not meet the needs of all Boomers.

Ministry differences among the 65 and older groups are equally diverse. However, these differences are often grouped functionally rather than chronologically. Congregations need to consider multiple program strategies to meet the diverse functional needs of the *independent-able*, *transition-able* and *dependent-able* sub-groups that exist within most congregations.

2. The challenge of partnerships and community coalitions.

Whenever and wherever possible, congregations need to establish collaborative ventures with local hospitals, social service agencies and other congregations to serve the physical, social and spiritual needs of older adults. The demands of ministry among older adults require cooperation with neighboring congregations and community partnerships with like-minded institutions. As we approach 2030 the public sector (federal, state, county, municipal) will be overwhelmed to meet the physical, social and community needs of older adults. Congregations need to get ahead of the curve and establish working relationships with these agencies. For the sake of those we serve we cannot go it alone.

3. The challenge of an increasing number of members with dementia and Alzheimer's.

Unless the medical community discovers a cure for dementia-related illness, by 2030 the percentage of 65+ members of our congregations who will have some form of dementia will increase from seven percent to 33 percent. How will the church minister to this group? How will we support the "care givers" and extended families of dementia and Alzheimer's members?

4. The challenge of ageism.

Ageism is prevalent in the church and systematically stereotypes and discriminates against people because of their age, just as racism and sexism

accomplish this for skin color and gender. God has a purpose for people of all age categories, and the church should not discriminate against those who have borne the image of Christ into old age.

5. The challenge of utilizing the strategic gifts and skills of older adults.

The church has an increasing number of seniors, but a decreasing number of elders. In the church many senior citizens are second-class citizens. Many congregations no longer look to their 65+ group for leadership. For two-thirds of their lives, God works to increase faith in our seniors, to mature their spiritual gifts and to provide them with the challenges of seasoned leadership. Then for the last one-third of their life the church neglects to use the leadership God has developed. If the church fails to value and utilize the God-given gifts of our older adults, then we will experience a growing disillusionment and productive loss of their ministry within the Kingdom of God.

6. The challenge of evangelism.

The church overlooks strategies and programs that focus on how to reach non-Christian older adults with the Gospel. Congregations need to offer leadership to develop a variety of winsome approaches to evangelize the 65+ cohort. Evangelism among older adults needs to become a high priority for the church of the 21st century. This is considerably a more difficult task than we might think. How do you present the Gospel to someone who for 40, 50, 60 or more years has intentionally and willfully said "No" to Christ and the church? The 20th century was a century of youth, and for the past 60-70 years the structures of the church focused their creative energies to discover a variety of approaches to reach the youth culture with the Gospel. The 21st century will be a century of age, and all expressions of the church, both modality and sodality, need to focus attention on how to reach older adults with the Gospel.

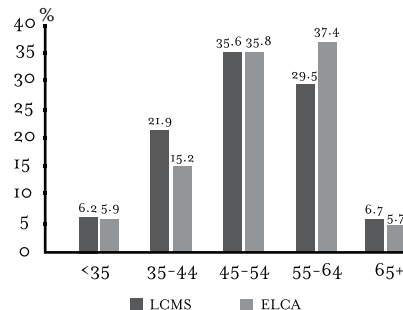
7. The challenge of pastoral leadership.

Mass-aging is already having a significant effect on leadership in the church.

The LCMS Department of Research Services reports that only 28.1 percent of active LCMS clergy are younger than 44, with only 6.2 percent under the age of 34. However, the other end of the age spectrum is much different. 6.7 percent of active LCMS clergy are already over the age of 65 with another 29.5 percent between the ages of 55 and 64. The same is true for the ELCA, with only 5.9 percent of active clergy under the age of 34 and 64 percent over the age of 50.

**ELCA & LCMS ACTIVE CLERGY
BY AGE DISTRIBUTION**

Source: LCMS Department of Research Services;
ELCA Department of Research & Evaluation



The data are clear that both the ELCA and LCMS will struggle with a shortage of ordained clergy. Alan and Cheryl Klass in their 1999 *Clergy Shortage Study*, conducted for the LCMS Board for Higher Education, reported that if current trends continue until 2017 "approximately 38 percent of the denomination's (LCMS) congregations will not have a pastor." Mass-aging has created a supply and demand imbalance for ordained pastoral leadership within Lutheranism.

8. The challenge to develop and teach a biblical theology of aging, death, dying, glorification and heaven.

One of the common findings in our research is that Lutherans are poorly prepared to die. They have adopted the secular myth that death is a "downward spiral." They have not been taught what the Bible teaches regarding death, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain," or as J. B. Phillips translates Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ and to die is to gain more of him."

In hundreds of qualitative interviews, over the course of many years, not one person can remember the last time they heard a sermon on "heaven" or "glorification." The Apostle Paul writes, "... and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Romans 8:30). It is right that we spend time in our proclamation and teaching on what it means to be "called" and "justified," but it is not right that we neglect what the Bible teaches regarding "glorification." Our congregations need to respond to the challenge of the Apostle Peter, "*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed*" (1 Peter 5:1).

9. **The challenge of postmodernity.**

I will address this final challenge in a bit more detail. Congregations need to equip older adults with an adequate Christology to sustain them in a culture of postmodernity. The quantitative and qualitative research conducted by Church Resources indicates that the faith of older adults is under attack and not as stable as we once thought. The church needs to help older adults reconfirm faith and "*grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18).

To understand this challenge we need to understand that Christian adults, in their 50s, 60s and older, were nurtured and educated in the modernist world. They learned to value objectivity, scientific knowledge, technology, progress, linear thinking, analytical reasoning and practical experimentation. Through their Christian education (sermons, Sunday School, confirmation, Bible reading and memorization, etc.) they adopted a worldview that included *revelation* as well as *reason* as foundations for prepositional truth that could either be confirmed or proven false. They were positive people believing that the mega-problems of the world and the soul could be solved.

At the beginning of the 21st century the modern, rational world in which older adults were raised has caved in on itself.

Today's older adults are caught in the channel-surfing world of postmodernity that has lost the capacity for linear and analytical reasoning. The rational world of their formative years has been replaced by a subjective, psychological and feeling-based worldview that leaves our older adults with a sense that they are bizarre relics of a future that never came.

The postmodern worldview in popular forms pervades all segments of 21st century culture and is often the defining worldview of the children and grandchildren of older adults. Thus our older adults are held captive by both the popular culture in which they live and by their family ties. How can they continue to believe what they once did believe when their world and family has changed so much?

This is why I recommend that congregations need to equip older adults with an adequate Christology to sustain them in a culture of postmodernity. In my workshops on ministry among older adults I often refer to this by the shorthand expression, "we need to reconfirm the faith of our older adults." However, I am not envisioning only a re-catechesis with Martin Luther's Small/Large Catechism. While a review of historic Christian truths is always helpful, what our older adults need is greater (increased) vision of Jesus Christ.

But this has been true for older adults of every century. One of the great burdens of the author of Hebrews is that the congregation to whom he writes, an older Jewish congregation, should pay closer attention to Jesus, "*Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession ...*" (3:1). "Consider Jesus," focus on him, stay close to him, keep him in your thoughts, learn how he sees the world. Consider his accomplished work as the "apostle" (sent one or representative) of God, and his current work as the "high priest" of our confession. The way to strengthen faith among older adults is to help them "consider" the person and work of Jesus.

Further, the author of Hebrews provides the reason why we need to focus greater attention on the person and work of Christ, "Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (2:1). This is what our case study research reveals. In all national churches, in all districts, synods, conferences and clusters, congregation by congregation, with rare exception our older adults are drifting from historic, biblical faith.

* The postmodernity of our culture is a challenge to the faith of our older adults. The church needs to identify our best apologists, teaching theologians, pastors and Christian educators to address this challenge.

Conclusion

The tsunami of mass-aging is real ... this is not fiction. The reality of mass-aging provides the church with either our greatest peril or greatest potential. As we face the 21st century, business as usual in the church won't cut it! The church needs to respond to the alarm of mass-aging and wake-up at all levels ... individuals, congregations, districts and national offices. All institutions and agencies within the church need to engage in a careful diagnostic assessment of the implications of mass-aging in their ministry.





MARVIN BERGMAN

Age-Wave Adults: Faith Challenges and Opportunities



For some, retirement is the best time of their lives. These are the “power” years when one can enjoy

a life without work or pressure in which your days are spent baking for the grandchildren or playing eighteen holes of golf in the morning, followed by a leisurely lunch and afternoon of bridge, then cocktails, a delicious early dinner and a good movie (Dychtwald 5).

Later adulthood is the time to live the “life of Riley,” to experience the joys of not working, and to enjoy a great time to loaf (Zelinski 1). Older adulthood is the time to earn one’s “Doctorate in Leisure” (xiii).

For others, getting old is hell. They identify with psychologist G. Stanley Hall who wrote more than a century ago:

To learn that we are really old is a long, complex, and painful experience. Each decade the circle of the Great Fatigue narrows around us, restricting the intensity and endurance of our activities At sixty we realize that there is but one more threshold to cross before we find ourselves in the great hall of discard (qtd. in Cole 55).

• Illustration by Tannon Osten •

ISSUES



A contemporary observer of aging adults suggests:

Because long lives have become the rule rather than the exception, and because collective meaning systems have lost their power to infuse aging with widely shared significance, we have become deeply uncertain about what it means to grow old (Cole 3).

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A fourth view relates successful aging to spirituality. Spirituality, some say, provides new ways of understanding life and self, promotes positive attitudes, enables one to cope with problems, helps one to focus more on others, provides a futures perspective, correlates with better health, assists one to face impending death, enables one to maintain a sense of meaning, leads to a greater acceptance of inevitable losses, and addresses important social needs (Moody 106-107 and Moberg, 2001, 91-93. See also Schaie 20-43).

When seeking to define spirituality, researchers quickly note the challenge. One

researcher found 27 definitions of spirituality. Nine definitions emphasized meaning and unity, eight focused on the transcendent, three saw spirituality as a motivating force or belief in a power beyond self, three linked spirituality with breath and its activities, and four said that spirituality is not observable. (Moberg, 2005, 13). There is no agreement among researchers on what spirituality is, and there is no hope for a consensus. For many, spirituality is defined by one's own criteria.

Another road to travel in exploring the aging journey is to name questions which confront older persons. Though attempts to list significant questions will result in a diversity of responses, this discussion will name eight questions suggested by a theological perspective. The focus is on the Age-Wave, defined as the generation eligible for retirement between 2008 and 2026. The purpose of the discussion is to see basic questions as challenges in the faith journey of aging persons which offer opportunities for ministry. An inter-relationship among the questions will be assumed, though the questions are discussed in a linear way.

Faith Issues Facing Age-Wave Adults

Eight faith questions observed in Genesis relevant in the lives of older persons are: 1. Who is my God? 2. What is the foundation of truth? 3. Who am I? 4. What is my purpose? 5. With whom will I connect? 6. How can I use God's gifts? 7. How can I cope with suffering and death? 8. How can I serve Christ, His church, and society? Luther's perspectives on the Genesis passages will be cited to illuminate the questions.

1. Who is My God?

After the Fall of Adam and Eve, God's first Word was "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). As Luther comments, the living God is delivering two messages: judgment upon disobedience and a call to return, though Adam did not recognize this fatherly concern (Pelikan 180-181). These two messages identify the two religions in the world. One is based on the character of the gods who deal with our predicaments by demanding deeds that justify. The second highlights the

character of a gracious Lord whose mission is to seek and save a terminal world. "Who is God?" is an important theological question, but asking "Who is my God?" makes the issue personal, existential, and confessional.

That members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are clear about their Center is seen in the most recent, major study of their faith lives, *Congregations at Crossroads*. Ninety-nine percent confessed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on a cross and rose again (Benson 51).

Although so many named the Gospel as the focus of faith and life, the study revealed ambiguity regarding perceptions of God's character. The number of adults who agreed with the statement, "I believe that I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved" was 53 percent (51).

This finding reflects results of earlier studies. In 1972, a comprehensive study of members of the then-existing three largest Lutheran denominations found that six of ten Lutherans had a grasp of the Gospel while four of ten adults of the same sample reflected a Law orientation (Strommen 103). In the same study, nearly 60 percent agreed with the statement, "The main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules for right living" (369). In 1982, a study found that the number of Lutherans who agreed with the statement, "Although there are many religions in the world, most of them lead to the same God" was 58 percent (Reuss 31).

The point in citing these data is to underscore the significance of the question, "Who Is My God?" Though the Gospel is surely being proclaimed by pastors, taught by teachers, and taught and confessed by families, Law-Gospel challenges and opportunities today are the same as those confronted by Paul in his letters to the Galatians and Romans, where the apostle became intentional in addressing the issues.

2. What is the Foundation of Truth?

The third chapter of Genesis records a serpent's question, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" Here, one sees a classic confrontation between the father of lies and the Word of God.

As Luther explains, the serpent did more than issue an invitation to pick fruit; rather, with a word it attacked the Word and God's good will (Pelikan 146).

Data suggest that LCMS members affirm Scripture as their foundation. Ninety-six percent of an LCMS sample, ages 50 and older, reflected "orthodox beliefs" on a scale consisting of five basic affirmations of the Christian faith based on the Scriptures (Benson 40).

While 98 percent of the adults affirmed that "the Bible is the inspired word of God," there was diversity in interpreting what this means. Nearly 65 percent affirmed that the Bible "is without error and the only norm for faith and life." Seventeen percent believed that the Bible is "without error in spiritual matters and our only norm for faith and life, but not without error in matters of science, history, or other secular fields." Sixteen percent believed that though the Bible is our only norm for faith and life, it was written by human beings and is therefore subject to errors in both spiritual and secular matters (Benson 7).

Such a diversity of views invites study and teaching of biblical and confessional perspectives of revelation and truth. One can see opportunities for dialogue with other worldviews and truth claims in the questions being raised by laity related to an array of topics. Examples include: world religions; the neurosciences, biology and anthropology; philosophies such as pragmatism and post-positivism; and societal views of human life, marriage, and family.

Issues related to the "What is the foundation of truth?" question are compounded by generations today who have traded Scripture as the foundation of truth for the quest of psychological comfort and the assurance that one is "okay," which can lead to relativism and a moral autonomy (see Wolfe). This trade also can result in ignoring truth questions and distorting the central message of the Scriptures, that we are sinners in need of the grace of God (Meador 91). When major human predicaments, such as shame, guilt, anxiety, the power of sin, death, and evil are not addressed in constructive ways, the search

for answers provides huge opportunities to explore the truth foundation of the Gospel and the Scriptures.

3. Who Am I?

That human beings are gifted with identity was announced in Genesis: "Then God said, 'Let us make man (mankind) in our image, in our likeness'" (1:26). Luther observes that being made in the image of God sets human beings apart from the rest of creation (Pelikan 56). Being made in the image of God means that a human being is designed to reflect the Creator's character in one's memory, intellect, and will (60).

The Fall shattered that image and with it our identity, but it also set the stage for the gift of a second image. As Paul points out, just as we carry the image of the man of dust, we also do and will carry a new image through the One who was resurrected from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:48-49). This new image and identity are formed through Baptism which connects one to the resurrected Christ (Romans 6).

The gift of identity addresses significant issues related to earlier stages in life and also to one's aging. Perceptions of one's identity are a challenge in a society in which gerontophobia and age-discrimination are common. The realization that one can be seen as obsolete on the day of retiring from a job can be devastating. Investments of millions of dollars in anti-aging products and plastic surgeries intended to preserve bodily features reflect struggles with self-concepts. Negative stereotypes of aging persons that are replaced by "positive" stereotypical demands that older persons stay young can create tension (Stoneking 84). These and other aging-image issues are opportunities to affirm that one's gift of identity in Christ transcends bodily features evaluated by our image and age-conscious society.

4. What is my purpose?

That human beings are gifted with identity was announced in Genesis: As a people gifted with identity, we have brains that seek purpose. The Creator "took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). Luther suggests

that working and guarding God's creation were mankind's greatest delight (Pelikan 103). In managing God's gifts of creation and life, man and woman found purpose.

How one manages gifts is central in the quest for meaning. In Jesus' perspective, the great one is the foot-washer who is motivated by the Gospel. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

Today, we are on the threshold of more older persons finding meaning and purpose in service. Age-Wave adults write new chapters daily through volunteer services whose value cannot be calculated. Gerontologists report increasing numbers of older persons searching for ways to make a difference by leaving a legacy through giving something back to society and the church (Dychtwald 230-233).

I hear objections. "Doesn't retirement mean retirement from work? Isn't leisure a gift to enjoy in retirement? Can't I have any fun?" Though leisure is not a word found in Bible concordances, having time to rest, being re-energized, leading a more balanced life, exploring God's creation and other cultures, having fun, engaging in new pursuits, seeking growth in faith, building on life-long commitments, creating new roles in church and society, and connecting with family in new ways can be pursued without turning vocation into vacation.

5. With Whom Will I Connect?

A fifth question is suggested in the Creator's charge "to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:27). Luther comments, "How blessed was that state of man in which the begetting of offspring was linked with the highest respect and wisdom" (Pelikan 71).

Since this launching of the generations, the challenges facing the generations to teach, nurture, and "hand down" the faith have remained constant. The generation that escaped Egypt through the Exodus remained in the desert through disobedience. The next generation "served the Lord all the days of Joshua" (Judges 2), while the generation that followed did not walk in the ways of the God of the covenant but chased fertility gods.

Evidence of a disconnect among today's generations which can cause suffering takes many forms: an emphasis by some older persons on activities alone rather than on being with other generations; conflicts among generations regarding allocation of resources; some older persons' perceptions of being neglected by their congregations; an absence of social-civic roles for older persons; stereotypes of older persons that accent limitations; the struggle of the generations to express a unity in faith which recognizes diversity in non-essentials; and the failure of some members of the generations to connect with their faith traditions.

There is an immense opportunity for Age-Wave adults to connect with five or more generations. Each generation offers special opportunities for intergenerational ministry. A dependency by the oldest generations will invite the care of peers and those who are younger. The Boomer Generation's search for a sense of personal well-being will open many doors for service and witness. Young adults, who are seeking to live out their identity by making a difference through their lives, will respond to initiatives by those whom they see to be "authentic." They will assume leadership roles when equipped and given opportunities to serve. Youth, 80 percent of whom see themselves as Christian, yet who confess a creed described as a "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (Smith 162), invite a major investment as they follow in the footsteps of the Boomers as leaders. Children and younger adolescents, many of whom have the best opportunity to develop faith and values for a lifetime, offer Age-Wave adults multiple opportunities to nurture and teach.

6. How Will I Use God's Gifts?

"And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed ... and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food'" (Genesis 1:29). Luther observes, "Here, you see how solicitous God is ... He also provides his food that nothing may be lacking" (Pelikan 72). Gifts were placed into the hands of mankind to manage.

Members of the Age-Wave generation blessed with mission and ministry eyes can

quickly develop an agenda to use their gifts in involving their peers and leading the generations.

Examples are many. There are houses shattered by wind and water that need to be rebuilt; there are churches and schools waiting to be built and renovated; there are ministries to be expanded and new ones to be developed that involve older persons, middle-age adults, young adults, singles, women, men, youth, and children; there are family education and support centers needed in every community; there are more than 32 million Boomers who see themselves as seekers and believers who doubt (Roof 318); there are 42 million young people between the ages of ten and 19 (Smith 4), most of whom do not have a biblical worldview; there are ethnic groups to be reached; there are technologies to be integrated in expanding the church's mission; there are caring ministries to be launched; there are agencies such as LCMS World Mission, Orphan Grain Train, *Ablaze!* (that *Ablaze!* stands on a solid theological foundation, see Rowold and Scudieri, 2005) and other organizations and projects too numerous to mention which provide extraordinary outreach opportunities.

Possibilities for involvement in the larger community are innumerable. For example, in this country alone, more than 50 percent of the children have lived in poverty or on the brink of it at some points in their lives (Andersen).

Believing that the living God is Creator and Owner also can lead to a greater consciousness of the call to manage 100 percent of God's resources. As recipients of what is described as an historic transfer of 41 trillion dollars by the year 2050 involving 24 percent of adult Americans (Trumbull), aging persons today may find wisdom in the encouragement of leaders in the early church that one consider leaving one-half of one's estate to the work of the Gospel (Neill and Weber 69). An example of an opportunity is providing financial support for church workers who graduate and then enter ministries strapped with heavy student-loan indebtedness (See Lovstad).



7. How Can I Cope With Suffering and Death?

After the Fall, a new reality was announced, "For dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19b). As Luther comments, "The fall of Adam was from life into death, from health into sickness," which turned the source of food and material of the human body into the final stage of one's journey on earth (Pelikan 216).

Challenges related to suffering and death are seen in Joan Erickson's review of her and Erik Erikson's development of their eight stage psycho-social model of life stages and the emergence of a ninth stage. During their eighties, they continued to live lives of generativity, focusing on the final stage of achieving wisdom rather than succumbing to despair. "At ninety, both work up in foreign territory ... At that age, the vistas changed, and the view ahead became limited and unclear ... Death's door seemed just down the block" (Erickson 4). With greater clarity, they saw that their bodies continued to lose autonomy, that despair became a close companion, that losses of physical abilities were realities, that independence and control were challenged, and that self-esteem and confidence were weakened (105-106). As they viewed their last days on earth, their worldviews changed, with the bottom-line human need being trust and hope (113).

Their question was: "In whom or in what does one trust? What brings hope?" For them, what was needed was a cosmic and transcendent vision in which death is seen as the final gift, so that at death we can be what we have given (126).

Contrast this perspective with a Pauline view of dealing with physical limitations, chronic illnesses, Alzheimer's disease, losses, other challenges in aging, and death. The Apostle Paul, in rehearsing his experiences of being imprisoned, beaten up, stoned, carried out to a city dump, threatened by dangers at sea, and the target of verbal "bombs," was gifted with a faith that saw suffering and death as door-openers to the grace of God (2 Corinthians 11:23-31). When suffering and pain are seen through the lens of the cross

and the resurrection of Christ, faith sees beyond bodily experiences by presenting a new future which transforms a tight, clinging to life into a peace-full letting go (2 Corinthians 5:1-5). This is seen in a grandfather's last wish not to undergo major surgery that would attempt to extend his life. His wish was based on a resurrection faith that led to a readiness to depart.

8. How Can I Serve Christ and His Mission?

In the context of bad news announced in the Garden, the first Good News was a message addressed to the serpent: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15). One born of a woman would strike down the Tempter and provide mankind with a new future perspective of victory over death. As Luther comments, the promise that the Seed of the woman will crush the serpent is a revelation of the depths of God's goodness which results in death being taken away, sin abolished, and life and peace restored (Pelikan 193 and 197).

The first promise made in the Garden is a message which the Age-Wave Generation is privileged to carry worldwide through a recovery of the meanings of "apostles" as missionaries and "apostolic church" as a missionary people (Scudieri, 1997, 23 & 72-73). They can embody the transforming perspective that every church and school are missionary outposts, that every member is a missionary, and that districts, the Synod, church universities and seminaries exist to equip for mission and ministry. This missionary vision of laity equipped for mission and ministry by pastors, teachers, DCEs, deaconesses, and other workers can lead to a new day in the life of the church. With the experience of aging deepening a quest for faith and hope by many older persons, we can seize outreach opportunities that will transform a maintenance posture of congregations into a lively engagement in Christ's single mission with two sides, outreach and teaching, which are implemented in an array of ministries.

Age-Wave adults are gifted with multiple assets to invest in mission and ministry. One asset is a tradition based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the solid foundations of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, which address the basic questions of aging in life-expanding ways. This worldview of a life of service and witness is presented simply yet powerfully by the content and order of the Six Chief Parts of Luther's Catechisms which deserve to be pondered in every stage of life. A second asset is unparalleled gifts of time and resources which when invested wisely will impact many generations. A third asset is a corps of committed laity who are ready to use their gifts in service and witness when they are equipped and are "given permission" to do what they are called to do (1 Peter 2:1-10). A fourth is the readiness of women and men to engage in ministry teams, an organizational structure that is compatible with contemporary mindsets.

A fifth asset is intergenerational networks which involve family, work, neighbors, schools, churches, leisure activities, community organizations, and other groups. A sixth asset is the experience and wisdom of the older generations that can be tapped in the service of Christ and His mission.

A seventh asset is the gift of intelligence which can be defined simply as the ability to solve problems. As neuroscientists remind us in their re-conceptualizing of aging brains which can develop new neurons and pathways, the cognitive capacities of older persons, despite certain cognitive losses, actually can grow stronger, peaking in their sixties, seventies, and eighties. One result is a late-emerging strength of wisdom consisting of thought and accumulated experience (See Goldberg). Without a doubt, God's gift of intelligence, linked to faith and prayer nourished by Word and Sacraments, is a mighty tool in the aging journey for expanding Christ's mission. The question is, "How will the Age-Wave and all generations use their brains in the service of Christ and His mission?"

Age-Wave disciples, motivated by the power of the Gospel, gifted with eyes of faith

to respond to the questions and challenges of aging, and involved in pursuing an abundance of opportunities to serve Christ, his Church, and society during a 20-year window, can look upon this season of their lives as a very special time. This is a time when, as T. S. Eliot suggested, older persons ought to be explorers (qtd. in Hays and Hays 13), affirming until their last breath, "to live is Christ, to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

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SHIRLEY BERGMAN

The Graying and Greening of the Church



Salt, a tasty preservative, and pepper, a scattered, pungent fruit, remind one of Jesus' assertion that we "are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13) and of God's declaration that we are a scattered people (Zechariah 10:9) who are to retain our flavor by living as God's seasoned people who are sent on a mission.

This article will highlight the strengths of older adults and their unprecedented potential for leadership roles rather than the limitations (such as chronic illnesses or the frail, final years) of the salt and pepper generations. Opportunities for the greening of the church, guided by the Holy Spirit for charted and uncharted legacy ministries in the local congregation, the community, and the church-at-large, will be described.

The Changing Face of Aging

Many people have an image of aging that may be 20 years out of date (Suzman 3). This may be the result of a lack of awareness that today's older Americans are changing the face of aging, and that the Boomers continue to redefine aging. For example, within the next 25 years, the age 65 population will double to 72 million adults. One of their major lifestyle retirement changes will be moving from work success to a *retirement with significance* because of major health gains due to technological and medical advances. Many of these adults will seek rewarding experiences in volunteer, work, and travel experiences (Kincannon 1).

Another factor in the changing face of aging is a more comprehensive understanding of aging. Neuroscience studies confirm that mental acuity and vitality continue to grow and flourish well into the second half of life, and that in the absence of disease, there is little declination in intelligence, learning abilities, memory or motivation (Butler, 2000, 6). As one researcher explained, "Your brain never stops developing and changing. It's been doing this from the time you were an embryo and will keep on doing

it all your life. And this ability, perhaps, represents its greatest strength" (Trefil 1).

The average 60-year-old person can expect to reach one's 80s, and millions will live well into their 90s. This longevity revolution will impact both middle-age and older adults. With most people over 65 not working fulltime, and only one-half of those between 55 and 64 being involved in full-time work, a question is, "Can the United States afford to mass produce a dependent class of adults, or do healthy, educated, older people need to be engaged as productive citizens?" (Butler, 2000, 2)

The Graying of the Church

At the time of Jesus Christ, life expectancy was 22. One hundred years ago, 47 was one's life expectancy. Today in the United States, most can expect to live until age 80. Perhaps it won't be long until life expectancy increases to 120 years, of which the Bible speaks (Gentzler 1).

While the average age of citizens in this country today is 35, the average age of Lutherans in the United States in 2002 was 50, with 57 or 58 being the average age of church-attending Lutherans (Iturrian 1). These data suggest to some gerontologists that the future of the mainline denominations rests in the hands of mature adults, since the majority of people in these denominations are age 60-plus.

Fortunately, major denominations are experiencing a growth in the memberships of seniors. Unfortunately, the major trend in national church bodies is the downsizing of aging ministries staffs due to a lack of finances. This challenge faces leaders of both the LCMS and the ELCA.

The Graying of the Church Professional

When the question was asked, "What do the Concordia Plan Services anticipate regarding our church worker needs in the next 15 to 20 years?" Jim Snaft, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, responded:

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Like the rest of society, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod will also be affected by the upcoming retirement of the “Boomer Generation.” Actuarial studies show that the Synod will need between 300–350 new ordained ministers each year for the next 10 years in order to maintain the current level of such ministries. Commissioned ministers are similarly expected to retire or leave the ministry, with a need for about 400–500 new commissioned ministers each year to replace those leaving active ministry (1).

He added that the challenges to increase the number of students in our seminaries and universities who will bring the Gospel to those who have not heard the message of Christ are obvious.

Equally obvious is the question, “How can the salt and pepper generations help with this huge task of equipping church professionals?” Many of the mature generations have the time and dollars to support Christian schools, colleges, universities and seminaries to carry out the servant leadership missions of these God-given institutions. The prayers and leadership of the older generations are needed, and they can make a big difference in equipping men and women, both those younger and their peers, for ministry. Imagine the outcomes if older adults in each congregation would collectively support their closest Concordia University System institution and/or seminary. They would impact our educational institutions which reflect the strong presence of Christ and serve as “safe places” for people of all ages during this new century.

The Greening of the Church: A Ministry Perspective

The greening of the Church involves the “graying” members of the body of Christ who intentionally support, nurture and *pass leadership ministries* to the younger generations. Another facet of the greening of the church is conceptualizing and *cultivating new ministry legacy opportunities*, specifically during ages 55 to 80-plus. Never before in history has the

church been given such a large resource of untapped service and ministry potential. Our opportunities correlate with the biblical perspective that aging can increase one’s potential contributions to others and to God’s work (Harris 107).

The potential of older and young generations to engage in significant service is staggering. One key factor is unwrapping these generous gifts of time and service presented to both frail and healthy older adults. Another factor is cultivating a stewardship of time which is foundational for greening ministries. A third factor is a personal motivation that stems from Word and Sacraments to engage in an array of ministry opportunities.

Congregations are greatly blessed by older people who as stewards of their time serve in multiple capacities. Clergy often affirm that the day-to-day tasks are mostly handled by the mature faithful, even more so in retirement communities.

Conversely, many members of congregations are not motivated or are unaware of service opportunities. A service legacy (gifting a part of one’s allotted years in retirement for ministry) is generally an unknown concept. As Erik Erikson suggested, “When mature adults have few stimulating challenges ... and retreat from caring for and with others, stagnation results, which may be worse than death” (qtd. in Dychtwald 219).

The church, as a powerful shaper of values and lifestyles, is called to provide personal and collective visions that provide direction and purpose for living one’s faith. To project a powerful and significant view of older life, congregations, circuits, districts and the Synod might consider including a greater emphasis on Luther’s vocation of mission and ministry for the salt and pepper generations. Luther’s perspectives are especially relevant during this historical time period of increasing and troubling global religious and societal challenges.

Imagine how a vocational stewardship of time would facilitate the *Ablaze!* intergenerational mission. Recently, LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick wrote in a pastoral letter:

Through the proclamation of the Gospel, you and I have the power to open the doors of Paradise to those who still are in night and darkness. This is what *Ablaze!* is all about—reaching **100 million people by 2017** who are in darkness without the light of the Gospel.

Consider the development of a collective mission(s), vision(s), roles and legacies endorsed by new and older retirees to intentionally engage through the power of the Holy Spirit the **audacious *Ablaze!* movement**. Imagine the impact of several hundred thousand seasoned adults and younger generations who are committed to “gather the scattered” when guided by the Holy Spirit to green the global church.

Now imagine this incredible mission and vision *without the ministries of the salt and pepper generations*. President Kieschnick alerts us to the *scattered* baptized member decline of 500,000 during the past 30 years. He points out that only 50 percent of children in the LCMS who are baptized make a confession of faith at confirmation. At age 21, only one-half of those who confirmed their faith are active in congregations. As a result, congregations of our church body are closing every week (qtd. in Iturrian, 4).

Refirees (rather than retirees), as stewards of their time, can be a blessing to others in immeasurable ways. To tap their gift of time, does not the church need to lift up a collective vision for congregational saints to be even more intentional about responding to their life-long call? Do we need to remind ourselves that we as Christians are baptized to begin a lifetime journey of faith, service, and witness? Can anyone defend the remark of a church member retiree who said, “I’m just not interested in doing anything, and I like it this way.”

That older adults are gifted with considerable amounts of time is seen in a University of Maryland study which found that retirement results in an additional 25 hours of discretionary time per week for men and 18 hours for women (Dychtwald 213).

Gerontologist guru Dychtwald also believes that tens of millions of Boomers want to contribute and will contribute through all



kinds of volunteer activities that can become a tidal wave and even a revolution. He is confident that the psychological, social and spiritual rewards of giving back will lead Boomers to making significant contributions instead of catering to their legendary self-indulgence (Dychtwald 213). If 69 million Baby Boomer retirees, whose numbers will crest between 2020 and 2030, choose to do nothing except collect Social Security and use Medicare (Butler, 2000, 1), can anyone imagine the extent of wasted opportunities? By contrast, when people of all income levels, cultural backgrounds and ethnic groups are asked, "What gives you a sense of meaning or purpose in life?" they say, "Making a contribution and helping others" (Cohen 150).

The Greening of the Church Includes Passing the Baton

A major challenge facing congregations and the church-at-large is whether there will be sufficient numbers of young men and women who will carry out the laity-led mission ministries during the early decades of the new century. For many years, the Lord has blessed these incredible ministries who are currently piloted by seasoned adults, many of whom are in their 60s, 70s, and 80s.

Yet, there are pressing questions. What will happen to the LCMS extraordinary ministries when the Builder (born, 1901-1926) and the Silent (born, 1927-1945) Generations are eternally sainted? Will there be a swelling of the ranks of the younger generations to carry out these missions? Are younger cohort groups ready and willing to serve in the ministry functions of the church? If not, why not?

Passing on the leadership mantles to younger generations is an essential task for the church's ministry. So is carving out new ministries. The greening of the Church is about the "graying" members of the body of Christ who intentionally use their gift of time to support, nurture and pass on the leadership batons to the younger generations while they move on to sustain the ministries and explore new territories.

In the "graying and greening" of the church, we need to understand each generation's formative experiences, perspectives, religious characteristics, concerns, motivations, and potential. It is imperative that each generation recognize the strengths of the other generations in order to nurture and support one another. One of the most effective strategies is to nurture intergenerational ministry opportunities through the identification of congregational strengths and core values, such as: the shared spiritual life that gives meaning and purpose to all participants; commitment and connectedness to serve others in the Name of Christ; investing time for ministry needs; effective intergenerational communication; communicating appreciation and encouragement for those who serve in multiple ministries; sharing roles and responsibilities; and finding meaning in Christ-centered legacies (adapted, Garland's *Family Strengths* 244-246).

What Obstructs the Greening of the Church: Ageism

The ministry of the local church to and through older adults is often handicapped because of stereotypes of the senior population (Waybright 110). Despite older persons who exhibit such positive traits as flexibility, innovation, intelligence, ability to learn and motivation, ageism is a major stumbling block to their involvement, with both older and younger adults often expressing negative aging imagery.

As Robert Butler points out, ageism is a "social disease" that makes old age a curse instead of the blessing it should be (2000, 4). For example, the cost of ageism in the work-world in 2004 was 861 million dollars (*Ageism in America* 100). Non-monetary costs include a loss of a sense of purpose as well as an absence of a sense of belonging and social connectedness. As one would expect, volunteerism and unpaid work are adversely affected by ageism.

In responding to ageism, many Boomers say that they will reinvent aging and declare that contemporary descriptors, such as



senior citizen, elderly, and old are dated. Instead, they will use new descriptors that support active seniors as being eternally young (Harvard School of Public Health b). To perpetuate such imagery, there is considerable support of the multi-million dollar cosmetic rejuvenation industry, Viagra and plastic surgery. That childbirth in one's 50s is lauded is another indicator of this trend (Mellor and Rohr 136).

Is ageism also found in the church and in congregations? Perhaps one can respond by asking a number of questions. When congregations review a call list, does the age of pastors or teachers who are 50 or older make a difference? Ought chronological age such as age 62 or 65 be the determining factor for church professionals to retire? Do we create realistic opportunities for church professionals to engage in ministry after their retirement? Does the church include older adults as a major denominational resource for outreach ministries such as *Ablaze!*? Do we as Synod conceptualize both babies and *older adults* as the future of the church? Is there an unspoken, inherent ageism in congregations that have more older than younger people as a result of younger families/individuals leaving or bypassing these churches? Are younger people alienated by a lack of consideration given to music or by an absence of ministries involving young families such as early childhood schools? Are there hints of generational ageism in the non-participation by some generations in the church's service organizations? Is reverse ageism seen in fewer leadership roles for younger generations?

That society needs to explore the implications of longer life-years for all generations was pointed out in a conference report:

Generally we think of newborns as the future ... and the corollary view is that the older person is less or no longer valuable. In fact, the old represent years of investment, experience and knowledge; the majority constitute an *extraordinary national resource* (Population Solutions to Longevity 33).



• *Illustration by Madelyn Lorenzen* •

In a complex and demanding world, the strengths of each generation are needed, especially in the mission of the church.

How a Ministry Perspective Serves as a Corrective to Aging Stereotypes

The ministry of service is essential in God's mission to a broken world (Olson-Holman 146). Boomer Jeff Miller, a Lutheran Church Extension Fund executive, provides an intergenerational view of the church's ministry during the next two decades. He writes:

The present generation that populates our congregations often wants the next generation to accept everything, that is, the faith, the trappings, the customs, the buildings and debts and programs. Today's younger generations and the ones that follow them want to choose their own trappings. If today's membership wants to leave a legacy to the next generation, don't look at the land and buildings, don't look at the traditions and ceremonies. The new generations will want to choose what they want.

So, what is vital to leave with each generation that will reflect the "praiseworthy deeds of the Lord" (Psalm 78:4)? The next generations desperately need to know the CORE of the faith. We must enable them to stand on a solid faith-foundation. The next generations must see their elders living and sharing their faith, that is, putting skin on our beliefs.

While younger generations live in a multi-ethnic world, most of our churches are Anglo, with some being less accepting of others. It may be valuable for the older generations to leave a legacy of confessing our sins for what we have done wrong and what we have left undone. My fear in saying this is that we will think about it. Today's younger generations will not wait for anyone who only thinks and discusses. They know that God who acts through His Word and Sacraments wants His people to act today.

My prayer is that church will not stand in the way by raising traditions and rules to a

level of importance that surpass the CORE of a confessional faith in Jesus Christ and in the Scriptures as foundational. Instead, older generations must tell their faith stories to the younger generations who must then live their faith stories.

Greening is Education, Planning, Vision, Mission and Motivation

Another looming question is how to collectively educate and highlight greening ministry opportunities for retirees in congregations, circuits, districts, the Synod and in the world during the extended years of life.

There is a need to plan and balance one's social portfolio (family, friends, solitary time, leisure pursuits) during the later years. One needs to intentionally plan not only for essential leisure time but also the gifting of time to and for others. Unfortunately, millions of pre-retirees and retirees often are visionless and have little to show after 20 or 30 years of later life except for serving self and family. This narcissism and self-absorption also can be found among some church members whose mantra is, "I've served my time, let the younger ones do it." Is it possible that the church needs to be more intentional in lifting up a collective vision of a stewardship of time for congregational saints to recognize their life-long call to serve, especially during the second half of life?

People are motivated to volunteer with greater frequency in mid-life and during their early years of retirement. The parents of Boomers peak in their volunteer work during their 70s (Harvard School of Public Health-MetLife Foundation a 2). A major question for soon-to-retire adults is "Will there be many years of productive aging which follow the 'honeymoon' period?" Boomers could become a social resource of "unprecedented proportions" through active participation in churches and communities. This suggests a question, "Are congregations, the church-at-large and civic organizations prepared to engage them?"

Would it be beneficial for the church to begin a dialogue with the age 55-plus crowd

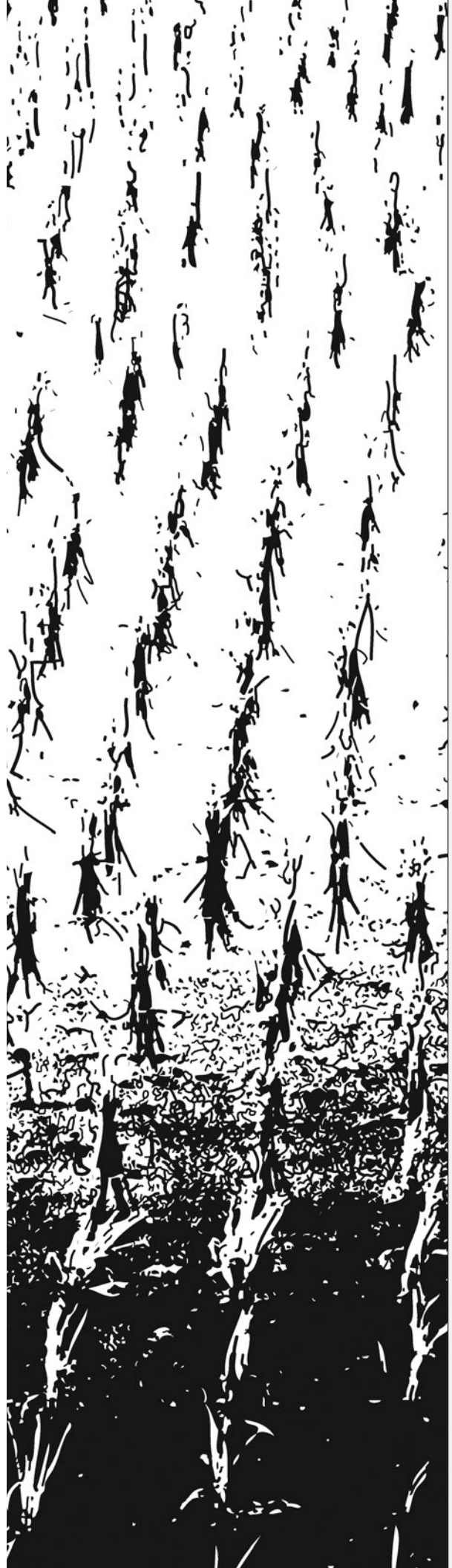
about the meaning and purpose of their gift of time? Would identifying ready-to-go ministry opportunities which engage individuals in a variety of personal interests and meaningful pursuits coupled with shorter and longer punctuated periods of service be constructive? Perhaps the how, what and why of engaging the generations is the task of intergenerational think-tanks.

Boomers and Silents are not exactly enamored with joining organizations or groups. However, belonging to a service ministry does provide a sense of purpose, fellowship and well-being. Abundant service groups exist in many congregations. The LCMS is blessed with many people who are serving. However, there are major gaps in ministry opportunities due to a failure to define and link people with a "goodness of fit" ministry. "There is never really a shortage of work to be done. Rather, there is a failure to find the structural niches that link work with jobs and skills, whether on a paid or voluntary basis" (Butler, 2000, 3).

What Can Church Professionals and Refirees Do for the Greening of the Church?

Acknowledging that ministry motivation stems from Word and Sacraments which issue a call to a lifetime of service, one can make a list of possibilities:

- Recognize, celebrate and educate the age wave of the 55-plus generation;
- Address the stewardship of the gift of time;
- Encourage and support re-firees to take up their life ministry calling;
- Help retirees transition to re-firees for the greening of the church;
- Collaborate and develop infrastructures within the Synod. (The Orphan Grain Train which serves in many countries began on the circuit level);
- Identify areas of interest and build connections to ministries that are a "goodness of fit" based on abilities and functions;
- Look for shorter- and longer-term blocks of time for service;





- Build intergenerational service-resource banks;
- Tap the leadership gifts of the salt and pepper generations for major tasks;
- Connect with the church-at-large in the development of collective ministries with groups, individuals, families and congregations.

Questions

Questions related to the involvement of the salt and pepper generations in ministry include:

- How will the LCMS mobilize large numbers of the salt and pepper generations for stewardship of time ministries?
- When the mature generations respond, will the church infrastructure be prepared?
- What roles can technology, educational institutions and the church-at-large play in helping to redefine the meaning and purpose of the later years?
- Why has God granted this extra gift of time during this historical time period?

It is time for all of us to stop avoiding the world, open our ears, listen to Luther, roll up our sleeves and start dirtying our hands (Siemon-Netto 13). Who can do this better than mature adults who have lifetime calls to mission and ministry? God has granted years of extra time to the salt and pepper generations for charted and uncharted legacies to gather the scattered people for Jesus' sake. The mission and ministry greening opportunities for the extraordinary graying population are to be seized and celebrated.

Indeed, "every old person should be a cause for celebration and not lamentation" (Hayflic 330). What is happening today among some is to be celebrated. What might happen if the salt and pepper generations would invest more of their gifts to gather the scattered and green the new frontiers for the kingdom by heeding the call to go and make disciples of all nations? This would call for an even greater celebration!

The righteous will flourish like palm trees ... They will still bear fruit in old age (Psalm 92:12, 14).

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book reviews

Wising Up: Ritual Resources for Women of Faith in Their Journey of Aging.

Kathy Black and
Heather Murray Elkins.

Berea, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2005.

In the book, *Wising Up*, the authors identify a very real problem. Many women around the world are undervalued, abused and treated as objects. "Central... was a commitment on the part of each of us to take our lives seriously in a world where women are at best undervalued and at worst objectified" (p. 107). Yes, many women are undervalued and treated as objects, and so are many men. This abuse happens not only in our current "sexually charged" culture, but has been prevalent since the beginning of time.

While I agree this is a serious problem, it is in finding a meaningful solution that I disagree with the authors of this book. As biblical Christians we believe that God gives women dignity and respect. As Christians we are to give each other dignity and respect. Mothers are to be given honor (Matthew 15:4), husbands are to rejoice in their wives (Proverbs 5:18), husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25), and we are all told to rid ourselves of sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language (Colossians 3:5-10). Just following these few verses would improve the lives of all people, including women.

In the book, *Wising Up*, the authors do not tell us to read the Bible to find out what God has to say; rather they center their work around people, what their experiences are, and then they create rituals to ease people through difficult transitions of life. When needed they modify God's attributes to suit their purposes.

"The New York Women's Liturgy Group gathered initially because the churches where many of us were members refused to take our experiences as women seriously. Even the smallest requests, such as eliminating the dominance of male-centered language as an experiment for a short time, were refused. ... We focused on eliminating anything patriarchal..." (p. 106)

Instead of accepting God as Father, the authors eliminate what they see as male-centered language in order to affirm women's experiences.

"It is the age of reaffirming the marvelous presence of a God who has walked with us, of a God who up until now has blessed us, and so gives us the assurance that he/she will continue doing so in the days and years to come" (p. 87).

The second assumption of the book is that conducting rituals will make life transitions easier. "Ritual can reclaim our belief that we are valued as children of God" (p. 18).

Each chapter of the book is written by a different author who offers rituals from her personal experience and perspective that address transitional events. While some of the rituals in the book have some value, others could be considered outlandish and irreverent.

I appreciate the thought of celebrating life before death as found in the *Ritual of Saying Goodbye*. (p. 104) Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could adequately thank God and express our appreciation for people while they are still alive to hear it? Surely this is what we do when we celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and other special milestones in the lives of our loved ones.

While the authors have identified real needs and have proposed creative ideas on how to address the needs, they pursue the answers backwards. Instead of suggesting that we study the Bible to learn who God is and what He has to say, they suggest changing the biblical attributes of God so that women won't be offended by the masculine imagery.

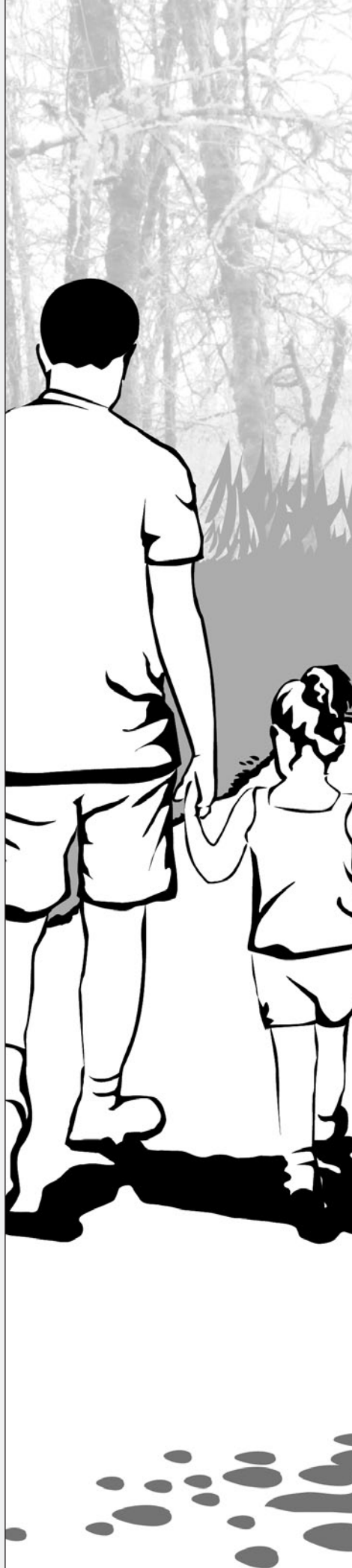
The authors' portrayal doesn't come close to describing the wonderful, loving, powerful God who is revealed to us in the Bible. The Christian faith offers us an eternal Father who loves and cares for us, His Son, who sacrificed His life for our salvation, and His Holy Spirit who teaches, comforts and sustains us throughout our lives and into eternity (Matthew 11:25-30).

God loves us so much that He calls us to be the Body of Christ, the children of God, and even the Bride of Christ. No ritual can ever compare to the reality of our identity in Him.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

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Where the Trail Grows Faint: A Year in the Life of a Therapy Dog Team.

Lynne Hugo.

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press,
2005.

Like the author, I am a member of one of the nearly 21,000 trained and registered therapy dog teams in the United States. The tasks that Lynne Hugo and her canine partner undertake are ones that I attempt in my own volunteer efforts: to provide companionship, stress relief, and a bridge for people to express their fears and pleasures in a non-threatening and honest manner. Yet this book is not just about the work that the author and her animal do for others. Lynne Hugo aptly demonstrates that the benefits of therapy dog visitation and volunteerism go beyond what this ministry does for others—it's a journey of self-discovery as well.

This book is a helpful aid for anyone interested in animal-assisted therapy. It shares the processes of learning to relate to clients and the challenges of teaching a beloved pet to help to meet the needs of others. Bringing one's dog into a residential or health care facility isn't as easy as it sounds; it's more than walking around greeting people. There are new sights and sounds for dogs to encounter; they must sit still in the perfect spot so a person with limited mobility can reach them; they have to be attentive to strangers while also paying attention to their handler. Human handlers must be attuned to their dogs, work on placement of the animal, and choose activities appropriate to the clients' needs, while also visiting with staff and residents. Lynne Hugo overviews these challenges well while highlighting the rewards of working with her dog to offer the benefits of animal-assisted therapy to those in residential care.

Yet, Lynne Hugo's story extends beyond procedures. The book is much more than a feel-good human interest piece about a volunteer project. This is also a story of a woman coming to grips with her own uncertainties and anxieties as they relate to residential care. She wonders when, if, and how, she might respond if faced with living in an extended care facility. She considers what the jobs of staffers are like, as they deal daily with concerns and frustrations that she encounters only briefly in her once or twice-monthly visits. As a 50-something woman, she considers her own mortality and projects herself into the life of many of the residents. And throughout her musings are thoughts of her own aging parents as they face

decisions about their living arrangements in older age. Throughout the book, Ms. Hugo creates a narrative of interest to anyone in helping ministries, volunteer work or service professions.

Lynne Hugo's previously published works are both poetry collections, and her lyrical writing permeates this book as well. She knows that a sense of connection to the natural world is essential as we live our lives at whatever age. In her own words:

What I've learned with and from my dog in a year here, as in the nursing home where Hannah and I share the winter of so many lives, is that there can be less to fear than I thought. Whatever connects us to the natural world and to each other is an antidote to powerlessness and despair. I've learned that nurturing is as essential to the giver as to the recipient, and that it empowers us in a transcendent and mysterious way. ... Creative nurturing can take place anywhere and, it turns out, is always mutual no matter how it begins: with residents, with staff, with a loving Labrador retriever. Children, goldfish, birds, mother cats and their litters, tomato plants. Anything counts, everything matters.

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• *Illustration by Paul Berkbiger* •



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