

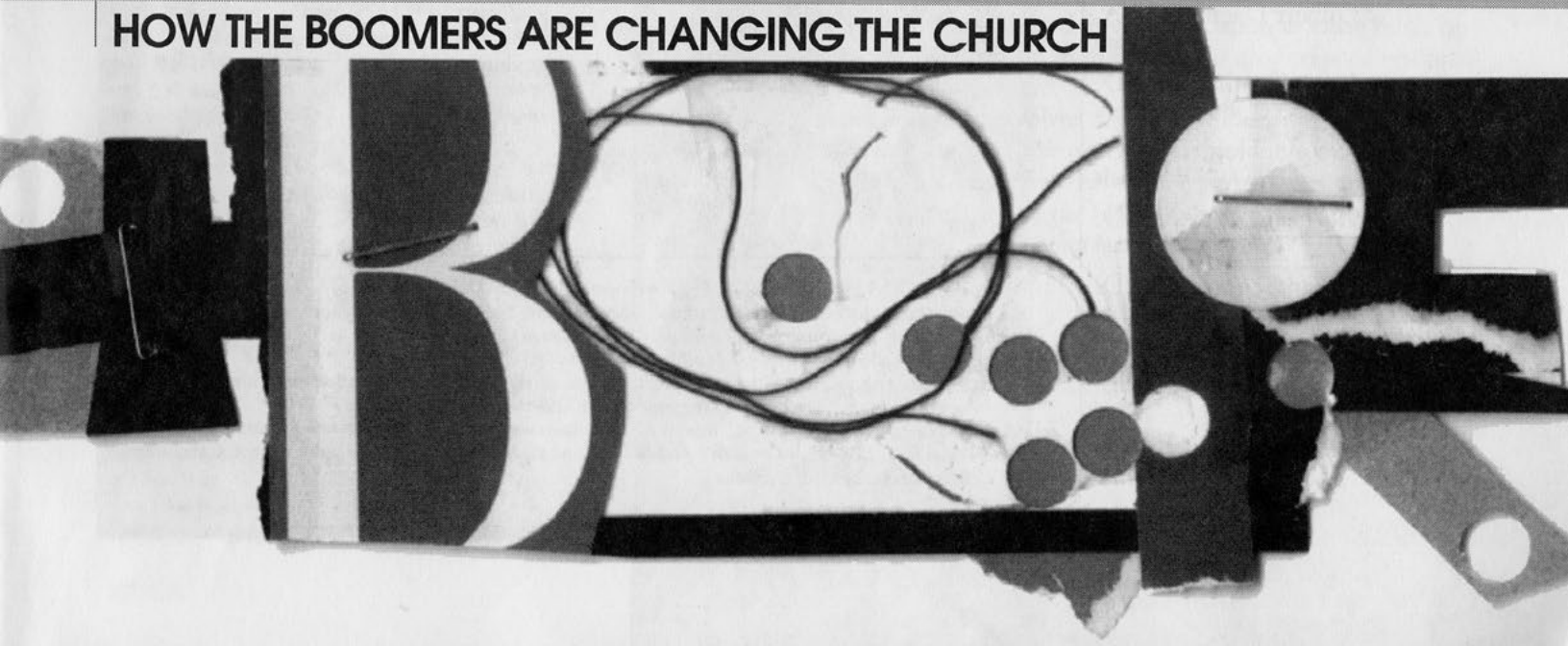
ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Spring 1994

Vol. 28, No. 1

HOW THE BOOMERS ARE CHANGING THE CHURCH



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IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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How the Boomers are Changing the Church

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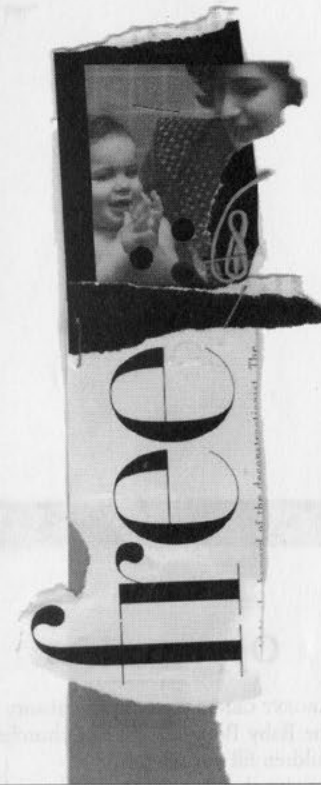
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editorials



Back to the Future

HOW DO WE REACH THE BOOMERS?

That question both intrigues and infuriates. Some, seeing the demographic handwriting on the wall, recognize the critical importance of doing what is necessary to attract and disciple this group which represents nearly one-third of the United States population. Others, honestly concerned about losing our theological integrity, voice concerns about selling our Lutheran birthright for the porridge of numerical growth. Further complicating the issue is concern for the preservation of long-cherished traditions and time-honored ways of carrying out the ministry.

I am convinced that "Back to the Future" is a timely way for us to deal with these volatile issues. As we confront a rapidly changing society, it is essential that we seek appropriate Biblical models for guidance and inspiration. One such model is that of the church at Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3).

This congregation has always captured attention because of the critical role it played in early Christian history. Not only were disciples here first given the name "Christian," but the congregation was instrumental in establishing effective mission work in the Gentile world. All of us with non-Jewish roots owe a debt of gratitude to the visionary congregation at Antioch.

reflections

THE PURPOSE OF THIS EDITION of *Issues in Christian Education* is to explore the spiritual journeys of the Boomers, people born between the years 1946 and 1964, and their relation to the church. In this *Issues* we are focusing on identifying characteristics of the Boomers, looking at their spiritual quest, considering their impact on the church, and suggesting effective ways in which congregations can minister to this generation.

Kallestad and Wright, in one of the three major articles, point out that Boomers were reared by parents who hoped their children would be the brightest and best. They were a generation of high expectations. However, many of those hopes and dreams have not materialized. Indeed, the Boomers are searching for something more, and during such times of introspection people often are open to the Gospel. Kallestad and Wright believe there is much that congregations today can do in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with Boomers: "So even though Boomers rebelled against the church by leaving it in droves in the 1960's and 1970's, there are signs that God is bringing about a hunger in their lives for the church. Boomers can be reached. We just have to know how to reach them. For what worked in previous generations will not work with the Baby Boom generation."

Many observers have noted that as a result of the Boomers' involvement in the church, it will never be the same. Both the characteristics and numbers of this generation present unique challenges and opportunities for congregations today. Approximately one-third of the United States population is today made up of Boomers. This generation in many ways is an untapped resource for the spread of the Gospel.

The choice before us involves two possibilities: we can demand that the Boomers become like us before we accept them, or we can discover what is unique about them and creatively design new methods to reach them with the Good News. It is my prayer that this *Issues in Christian Education* is of assistance in that decision-making process.

Orville C. Walz, President

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that this congregation grew up and flourished in cultural soil remarkably similar to that of suburban America in the 1990's. Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire, was a cosmopolitan center of government and commerce. Noted for its luxurious life style, the city had a reputation for being tolerant of various beliefs. Ethnically and culturally diverse, Antioch was also notorious for its moral laxity.

It was in this fertile ground that persecuted missionaries first planted the Gospel seed. The results were astonishing! Great numbers of Gentiles embraced the faith.

When this news reached Jerusalem, the response was something short of unrestrained rejoicing. Barnabas, a spiritually mature disciple known for his ability to work well with people, was sent to investigate.

Barnabas recognized the hand of the Lord at work in Antioch. He established an effective team ministry (Acts 11:25; 13:1) in a growing and dynamic congregation. The church at Antioch was characterized by powerful teaching and preaching, vibrant worship, and shared leadership. From its earliest days this congregation would display a deep concern for the welfare of other Christians and the plight of the lost.

It is fascinating to compare this great Biblical model with the characteristics of many contemporary Christian congregations which are thriving as they stake out ministries among the Baby Boomers. These churches are recognized for the very things evidenced in Antioch: strong preaching, vital worship, Biblical teaching applied to daily life, transformational leadership, high expectations, and numerous opportunities for meaningful service.

Such a ministry is demanding upon its leaders, but it is not theologically suspect. It is grounded in God's Word and is relevant to the confused culture of the day. Sensitive to changing times, it places paramount importance upon teaching people to follow a changeless Christ.

Christopher Dodge
Pastor, St. Michael's Lutheran Church
Bloomington, Minnesota

Ministry to Baby Boomers

AS LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS strive to minister effectively with the Baby Boom generation, they will need to face changes and challenges in two areas dear to their Germanic roots: process and structure.

While the numbers have changed for the "Never trust anyone over 30!" generation, now in their

40's, the concept remains the same. Valuable information, customs, and ideas, once transmitted from one generation to the other by means of proclamation and teaching, are gained not by listening to the "wisdom of the fathers" but from examining one's own experience. The Baby Boom generation tends to function as though their life experiences are completely unique. Therefore, since no previous generation has ever experienced life in this way, the learnings of previous generations are basically irrelevant to current life.

This viewpoint is destined for conflict with traditional practice in the Lutheran Church, which places high value on traditions, structures, and doctrinal answers handed down from previous generations. On the one hand is a church body with a strong heritage of doctrine and practice and on the other is a generation of people who tend to structure their lives on the basis of personal and ongoing current experience and perceived need.

The results of these conflicting viewpoints can easily become real problems within a congregation. Congregations may find groups of people experiencing and expressing frustrations with "outdated and irrelevant" programs, structures, worship services, or even doctrinal positions. Congregations may find themselves frustrated by a group of people who refuse to "play by the rules" or participate in activities and programs in the accustomed ways of the past. Congregations may seem rigid and insensitive to Boomer members by insisting on traditional practice, systems and programs, while Boomer members, in turn, may seem rebellious, impatient, and insensitive to the needs and feelings of other members.

The challenge to the church is this: How do we foster, encourage, and facilitate the creative discovery process of this generation of church members and at the same time maintain the integrity of a valued past? How do we enable members and structure congregations so that members of all generations give and receive ministry within the visible form of the Body of Christ, the church? The church must find ways to apply the creative action of the Baby Boomer generation to real issues and needs which are not always the same as those faced by previous generations of Lutherans. At the same time, we must constantly affirm those aspects of our heritage, both doctrinal and structural, which do provide solid foundation for growth and action with the Lutheran congregation and seek to find new ways to teach and apply that heritage to this time.

Jay N. Musfeldt
Director of Christian Education
St. John Lutheran Church
Salem, Oregon

editorials

Opportunities

THE LARGEST GENERATION in the history of this land, the Baby Boomers, fill our churches, and their children fill our schools.

Let us give thanks unto the Lord, our God.

Boomers do not like to come to meetings, do not feel loyalty toward their own marriages, much less their denomination or congregation, and seem to value entertainment more highly than commitment, content, covenant, or tradition. Their free time is more valuable to them than any other commodity. The Boomers fill our churches, and their children fill our schools.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Let us pray that the Lord of the Church will show us how to teach this generation of "Free Agents" that we are all one body and individually members of it, and that Jesus calls us to be faithful to the end rather than amused to death. No one will ask us on the last day, "How well did you keep yourself entertained?"

And may we see the hunger for meaning, the ease of handling technology, the need for meaningful family activities, and the appetite for entertainment as opportunities for outreach to and service by this generation the Lord has given us.

By the way, if we do need to change the ways we do things in the church, I will not miss the meetings.

Greg Mech
Chaplain and Assistant Professor of Theology
Concordia College-Seward

THE BOOMERS: PROFILE OF A GENERATION by Shirley Bergman

Dr. Shirley Bergman is the Director of The Lutheran Institute on Aging and Family, Concordia College-Seward.

Uniquely created, we watch our lives unfold like a story, gifted with different levels of knowledge, skills, abilities, life experiences, and purposes, becoming more heterogeneous as we age. In contrast, cohort aging over a span of 20-25 years spawns homogeneous personalities with similar stories and missions shaped by child rearing practices, events witnessed as adolescents, and the social mission given to each generation.

Many generations have lived most of their lives in the same congregations, sometimes for eight or nine decades. On the other hand, more mobile generations may locate in a number of churches for short periods of time. In these contexts, generational ministry will experience multiple challenges that involve value collisions, time and talent issues, personal versus collective needs, differences

in musical tastes, an absence of involvement by some generations, and crises related to fragmented families of all shapes and sizes.

Differing generational values may produce frenetic attempts to develop meaningful programs. Older generations, blessed with many talents and resources, often struggle to involve younger generations in picking up legacies, such as service. Gerontophobic lamentations can be heard about the greying of congregations with concomitant fears of dwindling financial support.

Recognizing that the church is the body of believers with differing generational personalities may enable congregations to deal with a variety of perceptual blocks, such as "That's not the way we've ever done it before," "I've served my time, let the younger ones do it," "Why don't more younger people participate?" and "Why don't they let go and let us do it?" Understanding generational personalities can help to lift up each cohort's mission as well as develop strategies that will enable the church to carry out its collective mission.

For example, a recent article highlighted a Silicon Valley church that offers Bible studies for engineers who, facing many pressures, ask, "What is it all for?" (*Omaha World Herald*, 1993). For them, the search for personal meaning in work, family, and society is a life constant. In their experience, societal images of never-ending progress, success, and then "sudden oblivion" do not mesh with their personal images of a "goodness-of-life fit" and unfolding stories of family, work, and community. Death is showing up on their mid-life calendars, generating more questions. Thus, spiritual questing among engineers is a contemporary hallmark. Such spiritual quests provide the church with a window of opportunity to bring the one Gospel that can quench the thirst of every generation's search.

Generational Profiles

In *Generations: The History of America's Future*, Strauss and Howe (1991) identify four types of cohort groups or generations of 20-25 years which occur and recur cyclically. Each type of generation has a distinct personality shaped by previous marker events that allows for projecting the unique characteristics of a generation.

Since 1620, 18 generations have lived in the United States. A small cohort of centenarians born after the Civil War, called Missionaries, is still living today. One major characteristic of that generation was an idealism evident in the lives of such representatives as President Franklin D. Roosevelt and W. E. B. DuBois. This generation was followed by today's nonagenarians, called the Lost Genera-

THE
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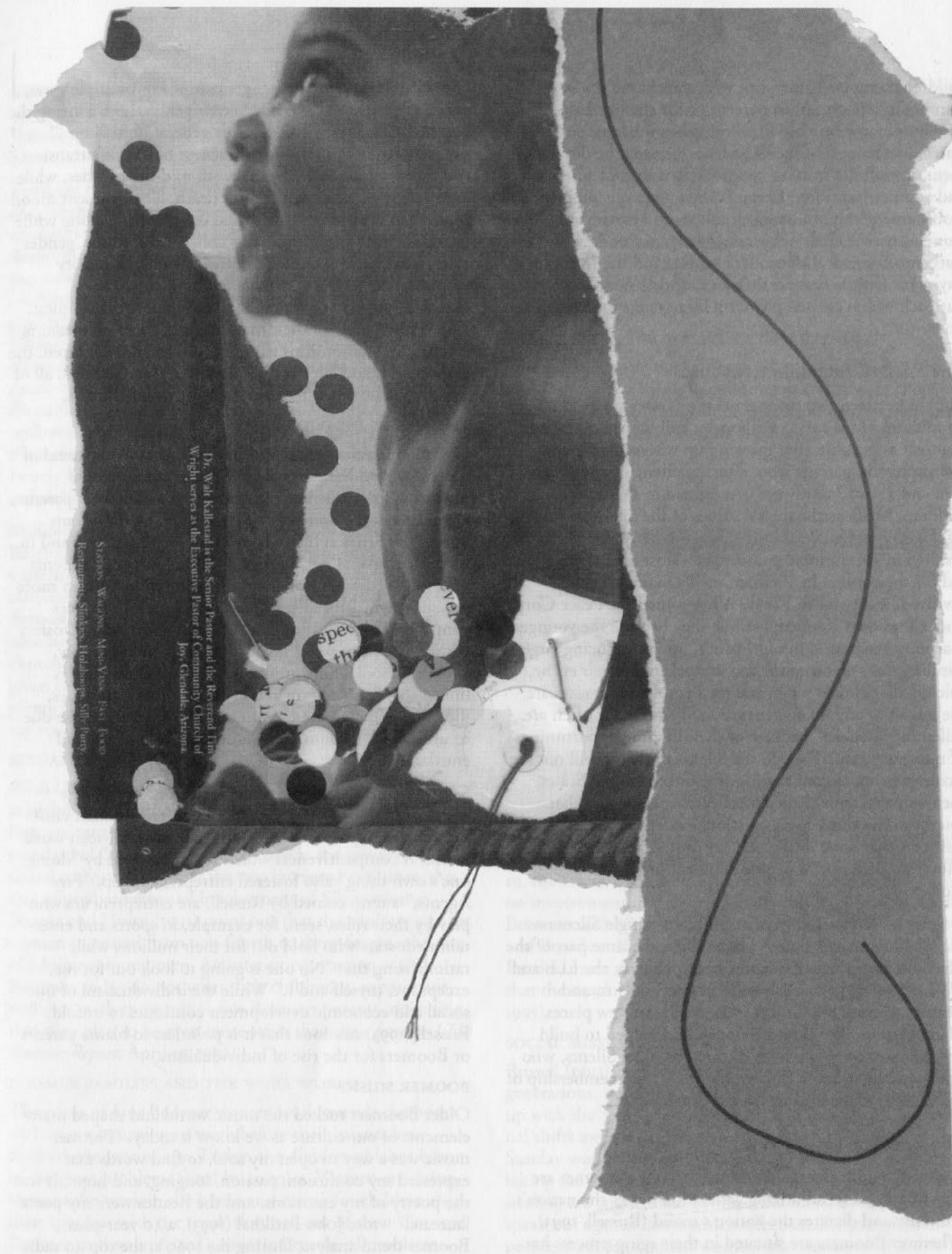
tion, represented by the early years of Presidents Eisenhower and Truman, who weathered both the stock market crash and the Great Depression (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

In reviewing characteristics of the four generations that followed, the G.I.s, the Silents, the Boomers, and the Thirteeners, the purpose is to identify generalizations that may help us to understand the Boomer profile. Such generalizations do not apply to all members of a particular generation. For example, Christian Boomers, a minority, reflect a value system that is different than the values of many of their contemporaries.

The G.I. Generation (1901-1924)

The G.I.s are called a generation of trend-setters honed by the Great Depression and heroic World War II struggles. Survivors emerged as confident leaders with expectations of later life entitlements, such as Medicare and Social Security. The G.I.s, who once numbered 63 million and now number 29 million, benefitted from a raft of firsts from the federal government, such as the White House Conference on Aging (1909), the U.S. Children's Bureau, federal child labor laws, federal age-discrimination laws, and later life entitlements. Members of this generation won nine White House elections, 99 Nobel prizes, and became the most affluent group of the 20th century (Strauss & Howe, 1991). They founded the first Sun City retirement community and the largest advocate group, AARP. Their children became the Silent and Boomer generations, while their grandchildren are known as the Thirteeners, whose age span today is 12-30 years. During their later years, the G.I.s rank as the "happiest" cohort when compared with younger generations. The social mission of this generation was that of winning a war and rebuilding a nation (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

The parents of the G.I.s, the Missionaries, encouraged their



Dr. W. W. Kalkreuth is the Senior Pastor and the Reverend Tim Wright serves as the Executive Pastor of Community Church of Joy, Oxnard, Arizona.
Sisters: Wanda, Mona, Vera, Paul, Lynn
Nephews: Steven, Stephen, Hudson, Sil, Perry

children to support and work with the church. Now numbering 418,000 or 16 percent of the membership of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the largesse and outer-directedness of the G.I.s have inspired the development of multiple mission congregations in strategic city and country locations. Through their generous support, a global emergence of missions occurred. Lay men and women spearheaded such auxiliary organizations as the Lutheran Women's Missionary League and the Lutheran Laymen's League that resulted in a world-wide Gospel outreach which created powerful legacies for future generations.

The Silent Generation (1925-1942)

Caught between two giant generations, this smaller cohort, 49 million, of whom 40 million are still living, conformed as much as possible after growing up with scolding and overprotective parents who, after experiencing the Depression and a world war, were determined to shelter their children. Inculcated parental values of the Silents included a sense of permanence, simplicity, and discipline which resulted in generational conformity. Most Silents were too old for the conflict in Vietnam, while many became involved in the war in Korea. A few joined the Peace Corps under President Kennedy. While they became the youngest marrying generation in our history, often producing large families, their divorce rate also skyrocketed. Their crime, suicide, illegitimate birth, and teen employment rates are the lowest of any living generation. Today, they often are called the "Luckies" because of their lifetime opportunities of monetary gain. Though the Silents probably will not see a cohort being elected as President of the United States, their value systems shaped a collective personality that sought to live out a social mission, evident in the large numbers that serve in the helping professions, and in their efforts to reach out to people of all cultures (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

One legacy left by G.I. parents to young single Silents was the Walther League. Later, many Silents became part of the two most important auxiliaries in our church, the LLL and LWML, giving generously of their time, talents, and treasure to carry the Gospel in new ways to new places. Many became church professionals and helped to build new mission congregations. Numerous older Silents, who now number 365,000, or 13.9 percent of the membership of the LCMS, remain active leaders of the church.

The Boomers (1946-1964)

Today, the odds that an adult American is a Boomer are fifty-fifty. This trend-setting generation drives the nation's economy and dictates the nation's mood (Russell, 1993). Wherever Boomers are situated in their aging process has

and will continue to impact generations in multiple ways, especially the Silent and Thirteener generations. During the current and coming decades, this generation will be preoccupied with their inner journeys of mid-life transitions, comparing early dreams with mid-life realities, while experiencing the sudden sniff of death. Their present mood is one that expresses an angst and search for meaning while facing the realities of children's college educations, gender roles, parental loss, contemporaries' deaths, transitory employment, AIDS, accidents, and millennial fears (Russell, 1993), all of which heighten their spiritual quest. The "Holy Grail" of their maturational quest for meaning is found in relationships with family and grandchildren, the work world, and later-life leisure and service pursuits, all of which can provide only a partial sense of satisfaction.

THE RISE OF INDIVIDUALISM

Childhood-rearing practices produced the master trend of individualism. Early Boomers experienced intensive nurturing from tolerant and permissive young G.I. parents, while later-wave Boomers were parented by the Silents during the fifties and sixties to think for themselves and to be competitive rather than team-players. Boomer parents who followed taught their Buster children to be even more self-sufficient. Russell (1993) asserts that such practices contributed significantly to an individualism which fosters withdrawal from social institutions such as the family, church, school, and community. Individualism also is linked to a concomitant rise in the number of suicides, illegitimate births, violent crime, and substance abuse due to unlimited freedom, self-indulgence, and feelings of entitlement.

Silent parents recognized television as one of the new communication frontiers and wanted their Boomer children to develop mastery skills for the new high-tech work world. A competitiveness which was developed by "doing one's own thing" also fostered entrepreneurship. "Free Agents," a term coined by Russell, are entrepreneurs who play by their rules, seen, for example, in sports and entertainment stars who hold out for their millions while rationalizing that "No one is going to look out for me, except me, myself and I." While the individualism of our social and economic development continues to unfold, Russell (1993) cautions that it is pointless to blame parents or Boomers for the rise of individualism.

BOOMER MUSIC

Older Boomers rocked the music world and shaped many elements of our culture as we know it today. "For me, music was a way to open my soul, to find words that expressed my confusion, passion, longing, and hope. It was the poetry of my emotions, and the Beatles were my poets laureate," wrote John Parikh (1993), a 40 year-plus Boomer trend analyst. During the 1960's, the top 40 radio

stations in cities played the same records at the same time, which meant that kids from all over the country heard the "breaking with the past" music of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and others who initially spoke of light and hope.

Then the message of the Stones, Doors, Jimmy Hendrix, and others changed to a support of a generational-cultural revolution that wanted not only to change the world by diminishing war and pain, but most of all, to rebel against the *status quo*, that is, societal authority figures and older conformist generations who saw virtue in postponed gratification. AM radio stations, while recognizing the changing messages, were reluctant to participate in the cultural shift. FM stations, however, picked this window of music opportunity and targeted market audiences with diversified programs of rock 'n roll. Soon, a new mix of orchestra and rock electrified millions of adolescents during their passages to adulthood as they embraced Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band and its message of drugs, sex, and technology (Parikh, 1993).

Millions of Boomers, however, did not succumb to the Beatles, rock music, or to significant changes in lifestyle. Current market niches include many Boomers who prefer classical music and new adult contemporary (NAC) jazz (*The Boomer Report*, May 15, 1992). However, rock music has acculturated the country. This confronts the contemporary church with a significant challenge when consideration is given to the church's musical heritage, the absence of young single Boomers and Busters in the pews, and sweeping musical changes which permeate society.

SEXUAL REVOLUTION

With changing sexual standards evident in the 1960's, the availability of birth control pills, and older Boomer rebellion against the strictness of their parents, the sexual double standard of "men only" was set aside as the pre-marital sexual activity of Boomer women increased two times the rate of premarital sexual involvement of Silent women. Strauss and Howe (1991) point out that the adultery rate for women increased from one-fourth to three-fourths the rate of adultery among men. An interesting reaction is that Boomers today do not want their children to experiment with sex, with three out of five Boomers parents indicating that they plan to be even more strict than their parents (*The Boomer Report*, April 15, 1992).

BOOMER FAMILIES AND THE WORK WORLD

Three out of four Boomer women work outside the home, with many returning to work before their infants have reached one year of age. Today, the division of labor is one of the great problems faced by couples. Women are doing more of the work in the home and caring for children than their spouses, with the result that two out of three divorced Boomer women initiated a divorce because of problems

related to this issue. Hostility among mates leads to a high divorce rate among older Boomers, with guesstimates suggesting that 42 percent will end their marriages. A lower divorce rate (38 percent) is projected for the generation that follows the Boomers, the Busters, possibly because young men are more supportive of women's entry in the work-world. By the year 2000, 80 percent of our children will live in a dual-earner or single-parent family (*The Boomer Report*, July 15, 1993). Only six in 1000 Boomer marriages will include a lifetime marriage with two children, a boy and a girl (Russell, 1993).

PUBLIC EVENTS WITNESSED BY THE BOOMERS

One Boomer male out of 16 served in the war, with others avoiding the war by dodging the draft (two out of three), becoming married (one out of six), flunking physicals (one of 25), or deliberately abusing their bodies. The older

PEOPLE UNDER 30 LEAN TOWARD A MORE SECULAR VIEWPOINT.

Boomers generally were the draft-dodgers, with the younger cohort that entered the military serving at a median age of 19, the lowest age in our history. Boomers were split 50-50 on involvement in the war (Strauss and Howe, 1991). Older Boomers also witnessed the death of Martin Luther King and President Kennedy. Despite their embrace of the Beatles, more than 40 percent of the Boomers did not feel that the death of John Lennon was important (Perikh, 1993).

SOCIAL MISSION AND BOOMER VALUES

Russell (1993), in her review of the value shifts among the generations, notes that the G.I. and Silent generations grew up with the Ten Commandments as a value base. Attitudinal shifts away from these values are seen in changes in Sunday work-rules, a significant rise in materialism, and taking the Lord's name in vain. Harming others bodily and stealing are condemned by most Boomers. Boomers often speak out against issues which affect smaller groups of people, such as pregnant women who smoke or drink

alcoholic beverages, but which do not infringe on their own freedom. Despite being the most sexually-experienced among contemporary generations, they are moral regulators of their children's sexual mores, largely because of AIDS and other STDs. Since violent crime is a threat to family life, 76 percent join members of other generations in expressing a belief in the death penalty.

The heart and core of Boomer values is self-interest, with personal choice being the hub of such controversies as abortion. With more than one million women having abortions each year, a majority of the population supporting *Roe vs. Wade*, and a growing political majority of "Free Agents," the legality of abortion will probably remain an option (Russell, 1993), while being fiercely contested by many Christians. Boomers will try to regulate the moral codes of other generations as long as they are not adversely

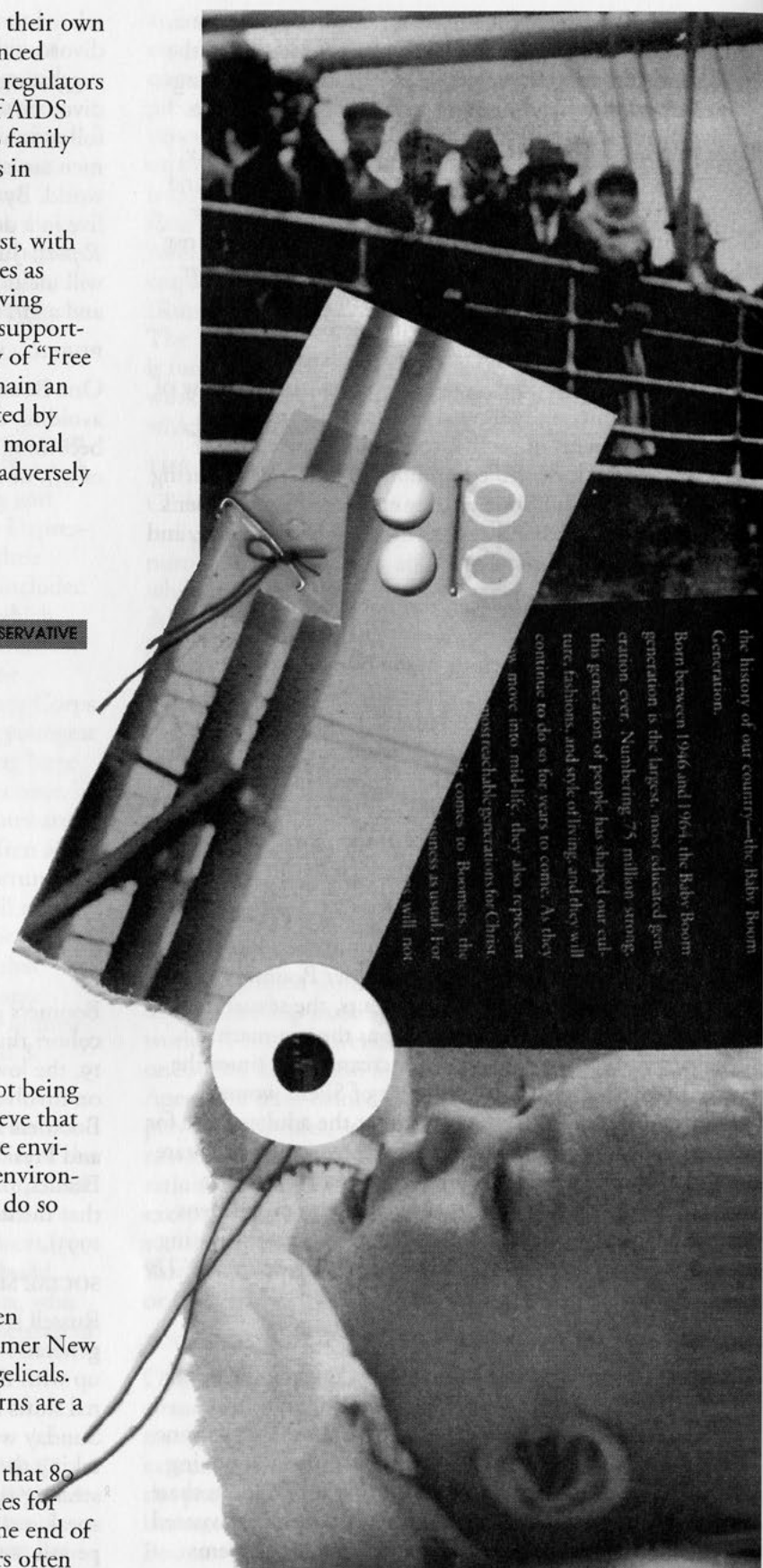
... WHILE THOSE OLDER THAN 50 YEARS APPEAR TO BE MORE CONSERVATIVE

affected, often expressing desires for action, but not being willing to make sacrifices. For example, many believe that they are environmentalists, but few sacrifice for the environment; few carpool; most do not pay more for environmentally safer products or recycle unless forced to do so (Russell, 1993).

SPIRITUAL QUEST

As Boomers search for spiritual meaning, they often experience a values clash between age 40-plus Boomer New Agers and more traditional 30 year olds and Evangelicals. Adding to this mix is the view that spiritual concerns are a matter of personal choice.

There are differing views regarding the prediction that 80 percent of the Boomers will leave mainline churches for Evangelical groups and New Age movements by the end of this century. One view suggests that older Boomers often



the history of our country—the Baby Boom Generation.
Born between 1946 and 1964, the Baby Boom generation is the largest, most educated generation ever. Numbering 75 million strong, this generation of people has shaped our culture, fashions, and style of living, and they will continue to do so for years to come. As they move into mid-life, they also represent an irreplaceable generation for Christians. It comes to Boomers, the business as usual for Boomers will not

align with meditation and reincarnation types while younger people lean toward "born-again" type conversions (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Gallup surveys find that age is an important indicator, with people under 30 leaning toward a more secular viewpoint while those older than 50 years appear to be more conservative (*The Boomer Report*, May 15, 1992).

Other observers maintain that Boomers left mainline churches because of confusion over the church's own belief systems. For example, Presbyterians advocated a liberal approach toward ecumenism and cosmopolitanism, which weakened the religious foundation of members. While Boomers search for both meaning and spirituality, they also reflect a lack of foundational belief. For example, when 500 Boomers, ages 33-42, were interviewed, nearly one-half did not attend any church. However, many affirmed belief in both Christian teachings and the tenets of relativism and universalism. The researchers concluded that churches themselves are to blame for losing Boomers who believe that no one church or religion has "the truth" and that one's spiritual development should be primarily a personal concern (*Omaha World Herald*, 1992). Another study found that a majority of Roman Catholics in the United States today do not consider church teachings to be binding. A generational difference is seen in the 65 percent of the Boomer sample who see the Pope as a moral and spiritual leader, while 86 percent of members older than 61 years view the Pope in this way (*The Boomer Report*, November 15, 1993).

Other research data show that Boomers will be the most important group for the church's ministry during the 1990's (Murren, 1990). Young Boomers who are in the acquisition stage of finding jobs, selecting mates, rearing children, and seeking community ties provide a significant opportunity for outreaching ministries that focus on spiritual nurturing and belonging needs.

A major barrier can be congregational perspectives which do not recognize Boomer personality characteristics, but rather reflect the values of older generations emphasizing denominational loyalty, church models designed in earlier generations, and worship forms that do not connect with younger generations. Because Boomers vote with their feet, it is imperative that congregations today recognize that members of their generation reflect a reluctance to belong, see denominational loyalty as being unimportant, are experience oriented, desire that clergy make sermon points concise, judge the church's morality by the participation of women, value singles ministry, are comfortable with high levels of dysfunctionality while desiring help, applaud innovation, and have a strong sense of destiny in shaping the church's mission (Murren, 1990). This suggests that we have a short time-frame to minister to and with millions of Boomers interested in returning to the church for spiritual

nurturance and a Christian education for their young children.

THE BOOMERS ARE AGING

Aging imagery threatens Boomers who fear multiple losses, such as financial independence and separation from a spouse through divorce or death. Many also are obsessed with preserving their physical body images. Madison Avenue recognizes their aging fears and will make billions of dollars by soothing and pampering Boomer later-life imagery, revolutionizing the cultural way in which we view aging. Middle-age will extend into the early sixties, and this will be accompanied by extending Social Security eligibility to ages 67-70 plus. Other important factors will be the self-fulfilling concept of one's aging imagery and one's lifestyle. An estimate is that 700,000 Boomers will become centenarians, most of whom will be women, while eight million women and three million men will become nonagerians.

With many Boomers living long lives, one must ask if the church today is planting seeds that will inspire ministry visions of new frontiers of service, so that people begin to plan not only finances and leisure pursuits, but also ways of making a difference through the gift of time. A recent study indicated that not only are many leaders of the church unaware of the coming tidal wave of Silents and Boomers, but that most church professionals and congregations are ill-equipped to respond to generational needs with the exception of fellowship activities such as bingo and trips (*Modern Maturity*, January, 1994). In addition, church professionals often reflect a gerontophobia due to a lack of aging education which results in a kind, benign neglect. While G.I.s are willing to tolerate a degree of patronizing attitudes and behavior, both Silents and Boomers have much higher expectations of the church's ministry.

CHRISTIAN MISSION

In the LCMS, approximately 719,000 Boomer confirmed members (27.5 percent of the membership) have transformed the church by launching or swelling Lutheran schools and other schools by enrolling their children. Preschools have become major outreach ministries. Boomers helped to launch Lutheran Youth Fellowship. Whether or not a remnant loyalty remains in future years that is comparable to loyalty shown to the Walther League remains to be seen. Many mature Boomers are re-careering as church professionals with a work-world maturity that comes with only age and experience, which also facilitates their ability to understand and respond to generational attitudes and behaviors. They are a tremendous resource for the church.

Multiple new ministry opportunities abound in both the LWML and LLL. New approaches to ministry need to be developed in order to respond to significant outreach needs,

such as a delineation of ministries among various generations so that value collisions rather than collisions become the norm. Today is an opportune time to respond to the spiritual questing of Boomers who are looking for custom programming centered around individual and family felt needs coupled with time considerations that fit schedules and a keen desire to making a difference in living out one's faith.

A Look Ahead

While ministry to the Boomers is a most significant ministry, congregations and church leaders will want to focus as well on the next generation known as The Thirteeners, ages 11-31. Numbering 80 million (differences in the number of Boomers and Thirteeners among demographers relate to the span of years identified for each generation), the Thirteeners are known by this label as the thirteenth generation since the founding of this country (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Thirteeners have been characterized as the throw-away children, unskilled, unschooled and unwanted. They are the most incarcerated generation in history and have been subjected to relentless pornographic sexualization, violence, and disruptive societal behaviors. It is not surprising that many of this generation express a cynicism about life in general that is directed to Boomers. This translates into social fragmentation and chaotic individualism.

The good news is that if this generation ages as prior generations with the same personality type, we may anticipate a generation that will undergo a dramatic mid-life change linked to a strong sense of conservatism, belief in strong family and community life, and a commitment to a social mission later in life that focuses on cleaning up the messes (Howe & Strauss, 1993).

Among the 457,000 confirmed members of this generation who belong to the LCMS, the future of their involvement is too early to predict, except that many of our children have left the Synod for other church bodies or are still absent while not being linked to any church. At the same time, one can note many young people in our schools and colleges as well as in some congregations. Needed is a significant investment in their nurture and support in finding meaningful roles in church and society.

Generations are always aging and shifting, moving up on the life-cycle notch every 20-25 years, and presenting new opportunities.

Congregations who attract Boomers will need to understand their generational mindset, which desires active participation in worship services, top-notch choices in this information age of educational programming, excellent nurseries, quality bulletins and newsletters, follow-up visits,

and a personal sharing of their weekly "in vocation." Can you imagine the generational testimonies of called Christians who dialogue about transcending challenges and learn from each other? The timeless Gospel and the same commission are given to all generations; what is different is a set of unique opportunities and strategies needed for each generation.

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Where have all the Boomers Gone?

by George F. Lobien: Dr. George F. Lobien is the Pastor of The Lutheran Church of St. Andrew, Silver Spring, Maryland

When the youngest is 29 years old, it seems strange to title 76 million people, one-third the population of the United States, Baby Boomers. Born between 1946 and 1964, Boomers have had vastly varied experiences of life. Whether they were at Woodstock in the summer of 1969 or whether they were five years old at that time influences what they are looking for in congregations today. Whether they were on the campus of Kent State University when it was stormed by National Guard troops, attending the University of Wisconsin when the math building was bombed, or newly enrolled in the first grade, may make a difference concerning whether or not they want *anything* from a Christian congregation.

Having parented two Boomers and currently pastoring a congregation composed of 40 percent Boomers and 22 percent of their children (the Baby Boomlet generation), I am keenly aware of the diversity of Boomers. I shall, nevertheless, speak to the question, "For what are Boomers looking in congregations?" My perspectives will suffer from the limitations of all generalizations and be informed by my personal experience and the research I have done on this complex and talented generation.

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU

Baby Boomers are looking for *integrity* in the church. Their generation has been influenced by Vietnam, the Iran-Contra affair, Watergate, and the resignation of a President for whom many voted. The Savings and Loan scandal, Jim and Tammy Bakker, Jimmy Swaggert, the misuse of funds donated to The United Way, and clergy in the highest ranks accused of moral infidelity have contributed to most Boomers being skeptical about institutions—all institutions—including the church.

As unchurched Boomers approach congregations to test the waters of baptism, it is natural that they raise the question, "Does this congregation want me for my sake or for its sake?" It will not take Boomers long to form an opinion about the genuineness of the clergy, the ministry, the people, of a congregation they attend. Boomers have asked for a copy of our newsletter, our by-laws, and our budget on their first visit.

Most Boomers returning to congregations want *help*. As succinctly stated in *Church Membership Initiative*, an extensive research project funded by one of our Lutheran insurance companies, "Churched people say to unchurched people, 'Return and be saved.' However, unchurched people do not ask, 'What must I do to be saved?' Rather, they ask, 'How can I make my life work?'" (*Church Membership Initiative*, Narrative Summary of Findings, 1993, page 5)

Baby Boomers want help with their marriages, with parenting, with singleness, with loneliness, with addictions, with building community. Some harbor guilt. Others are

angry because they are the victims of parental abuse or sexual harassment. For the next ten years, Boomers will be coping with mid-life crisis issues. Many are wrestling with vocational questions and the disillusionment that life is not as fulfilling as they imagined it should be. Many are not achieving the rewards of the good life they envisioned when they were growing up in families where they were pampered in home and college. Some are wrestling with the issue of what constitutes success.

Boomers are looking for congregations *in which they can give of themselves in meaningful ways*. While often portrayed as self-centered and unwilling to make commitments, it is closer to the truth to say that they are consumers of religion. Like all consumers, they sacrifice for that which they deem worthwhile. Boomers become very committed and generous people when they are able to give of themselves and their financial resources within the context of their personal value system and when they are receiving while giving. They may not respond to an appeal for funds for a church building *qua* church building, but they will sacrifice for the edifice once they have caught the vision of the ministry the building will enable.

Boomers are a people seeking *quality, quality, quality*. They despise mediocrity. As a group, they are the most highly educated generation in America. They have been raised with electronic media where no dollars were spared in producing quality programming. Their refusal to purchase inferior American goods and their selection of superior foreign products have created a revolution from which American manufacturers will not soon recover. While some say that the only way to appeal to Boomers is with gospel-rock, I have discovered they also appreciate the pipe organ and classical music when each is presented excellently. They also seek excellence from Sunday School, Bible classes, sermons, programs of ministry, and in congregational facilities.

Boomers prefer *options*. Accustomed to making choices, their busy life-styles force them into prioritizing the activities in which they will engage. In 70 percent of Boomer families, both husband and wife work. While Boomers tend to have children later in life, and tend to have small families, they are devoted to their children, and child-rearing impinges on the time remaining after work. The busyness of Boomers may contribute to the increasing incidents of child-abuse. The high divorce rate means that many single people are raising children and working. Scheduling activities for the benefit of children and managing visitation schedules in blended families can be extremely demanding.

Among the double-income-no-kids (dinks) Boomers, travel and recreation determine time available for church-related activities. Singles are even more mobile. More than any generation before them, Boomers place high priority on

recreational and physical fitness activities. Worship services offered at various times, including mid-week, appeal to Boomers. Retreats and short-term activities around which they can adjust their schedules to participate appeal to many. Boomers want to be totally involved in activities which are meaningful to them, and rather than attend an event half-time, they will more than likely not attend at all if they cannot participate in the entire experience.

The element of *choice* also applies to forms of ministry in which Boomers will participate. In general, projects relating to the poor, the disadvantaged, the disabled, the environment, their community, physical fitness, social events where networking can occur, and self-help groups appeal to Boomers. Recently, before I was able to examine the volume myself, I had to purchase a third copy of *The Twelve-Step Bible*, because Boomers asked for my book upon seeing it.

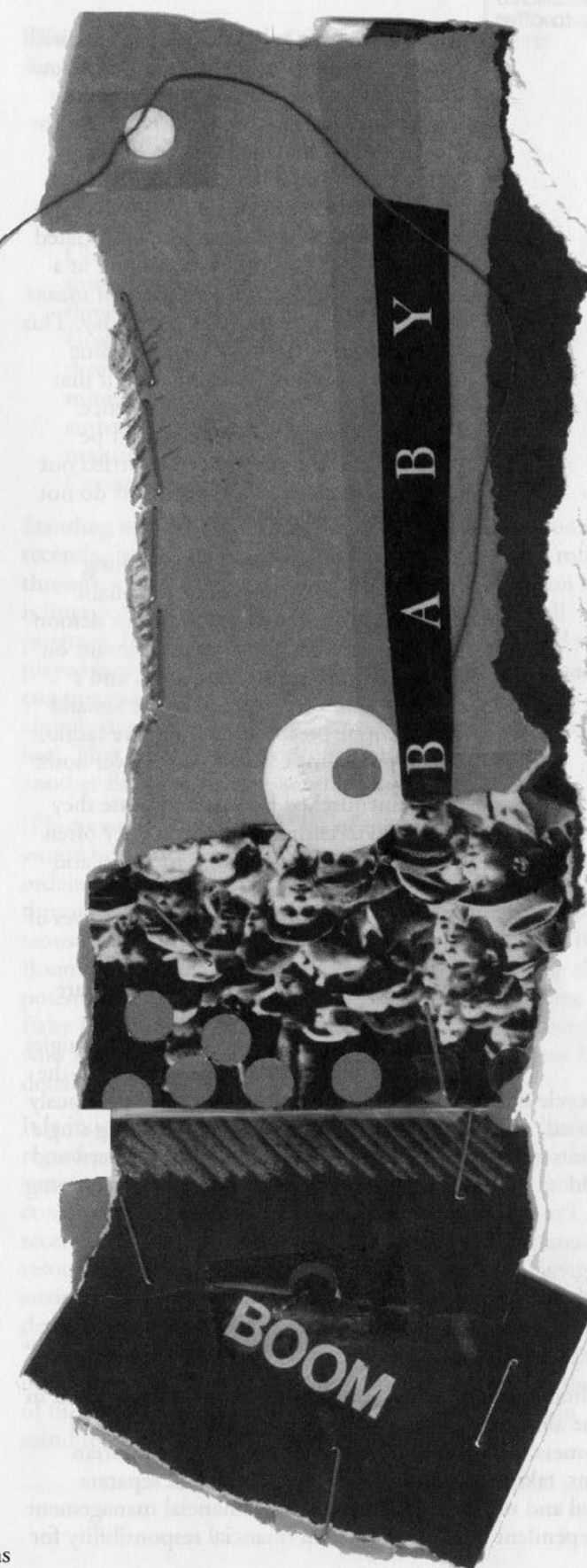
Boomers value diversity in culture and equality in male/female relationships. When they come to church, they want to see people of diverse ethnic origins treated with dignity, and they expect both men and women to be allowed to serve in congregations just as they work together in the marketplace. A careful study of 1500 Boomers by Wade Clark Roof summarized in his book, *A Generation of Seekers*, disclosed that 70 percent of those surveyed thought women should be allowed to be ordained. The women's movement in the Roman Catholic church is well-documented. Boomers are impatient with sexist and exclusive language and prefer that ministry be shared between professional church workers and the laity.

THE BOOMER-FRIENDLY CONGREGATION

Lyle Schaller observed, "Your congregation can get older and smaller or younger and larger." Changes to accommodate Boomers range from those that are simple to implement to those quite difficult to put into practice in established congregations which have not deliberately appealed to Boomers in the past. The changes mentioned are not intended to be exhaustive but are suggestive of the types of actions which may appeal to Boomers. Meaningful change will not occur, however, unless congregations make compassion for Boomers a core value.

Boomers will expect to be gratified by their first visit to a congregation. How you meet Boomers, greet, seat, provide child care, invite them to return or become a part of a small group are all important. Many Boomers prefer the back pews and anonymity on their first visit. They do not want to be displayed as "visitors." Deliberate, yet casual greeting by members—especially by other Boomers—is most effective.

The quality of the worship experience is crucial. Congregations



Congregations need to be open to receiving the gifts Boomers have to offer

which have been tolerating an organist with two left legs for fifteen years are at a serious disadvantage. Boomers do not appreciate hymns and liturgy with exclusive, sexist, or gloom and doom language. To Boomers, music is not simply entertainment. It is a means of experiencing reality. Orders of worship should be clear for the uninitiated to follow. The service needs to move at a reasonably fast pace with a variety of means used to express the message of the day. This latter statement does not preclude time allowed for purposeful meditation if that fits the flow of the worship experience. However, the worship service must be planned, and the plan must be carried out in a participative fashion. Boomers do not make good prolonged spectators.

To be relevant to Boomers, preaching should include references to personal experience, life-related applications demonstrating how the scriptures are relevant on Thursday morning at 10:45 a.m., and a touch of humor. Subjects such as sin and death can be preached in a positive fashion which proclaims Christ's power over both.

Most unchurched Boomers indicate they would go to church if invited. They often attend baptisms, weddings, funerals, and festival services. Such occasions make excellent opportunities to touch the lives of Boomers.

Many Boomers are singles, and there are more single women than single men visiting congregations. A ministry to singles must be sufficiently diverse to relate to the

life cycle of singles, including whether they were previously married, or have responsibility for children. Helping single parents cope with child raising shows genuine concern and could be as simple as offering parents a morning or evening out. Pre-school education, day-care, latch-key programs and courses on parenting appeal to Boomers. When a congregation can visualize itself as a surrogate father, mother, or grandparent to children in single-parent families, Boomers will respond. Many single Boomer women wrestle with issues relating to meaningful companionship.

Egalitarianism in board and committee membership and in those allowed to lead in public worship is important to Boomers. Many structure their marriages in egalitarian terms, taking turns with child care, equal and separate social and recreational activities, and financial management. Independent bank accounts and financial responsibility for

a specific area of their life together is most common among divorced and remarried Boomers. Congregations may have greater success recruiting Boomers to serve on boards and committees if both husband and wife are offered opportunities to serve in the same group.

Congregations attempting to reach Boomers need many doors of opportunity for them to participate in ministry. Small groups are important because Boomers want to know and to be known. Many are searching for a sense of community. They tend to prefer large congregations with small group ministries. In addition to fellowship groups, self-help groups, twelve-step recovery groups, and recreational groups appeal to Boomers. Community service groups and those that help new parents and parents of teen-agers are popular. Boomers are action-oriented people, so they tend not to appreciate committees which gather to ponder issues and do nothing about them. A strong emphasis upon spiritual gifts will help Boomers find the types of ministry in which they will feel fulfilled. Boomers resist being assigned or coerced into groups. They want to choose the activities in which they will participate.

Congregations need to be open to receiving the gifts Boomers have to offer. Many are not by nature leaders. Since, however, they are committed to learning and self-advancement, they tend to participate in leadership courses. They enjoy growing and becoming more competent people through educational experiences. They are risk takers who appreciate being given the tools which enable them to perform ministry successfully. While they need to know that failure is allowed and that failure can often be a valuable learning experience, they resent being set up for failure by inadequate training for a task or responsibility they accept. Congregational staff should support Boomers to preclude failure while treating them as adults.

An item previously mentioned bears repeating: Boomers appreciate choices and diversity of times to participate in congregational activities. Sunday morning may not be an ideal time—especially for the single parent balancing career and family responsibilities. Neither may it be ideal for the wonder-woman Boomer who must be wife, mother, employee, and church member. Since the majority of women Boomers are employed, this generality has wide application.

Recently, I complimented one of my Boomer secretaries on a new hair cut. "It makes me look younger, doesn't it?" she asked. I assured her that it did, but that she looked young even with her hair longer. Then she told me that she and her father recently took her children to a fair where her father insisted on having someone guess her age. He guessed her to be 41 years old when she is only 39. Obviously, it is the big "4-0" crisis time in her life.

Helping Boomers through mid-life issues is an important function congregations can play. One Boomer woman wrote she was concerned about the 3Ms: mortgage, menopause, and mortality. Another commented that she had no interest in "stitch and bitch" groups. While craft groups make important contributions to congregations, this woman obviously wanted to find a group which would relate to her life-stage needs. Both men and women will welcome help with issues relating to mid-life passage. This is not an exclusively feminine concern.

The Boomer Felt Round the World

When church statisticians broadcast the bad news that most church bodies have declined in membership during the past ten years, it is difficult not to be skeptical about interest in Baby Boomers who represent one-third of the population of our nation. In addition, the Baby-Boomlet they have produced promises to rival them in size. In between are the Baby Busters, one of the most difficult generations of all for the church to reach and the generation which should receive much of our attention before they are lost to God and the church. If we wish to concentrate on the Baby Boomers, there is considerable urgency related to this task, since the Baby Boom bulge has already moved halfway through the population python of our nation.

Many Boomers, raised in conservative, godly families, are returning to the values of their youth, but in new ways. Their yearning for spiritual experience supports the New Age movement, meditation groups, and interest in reincarnation. Even though many Boomers were only children when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, they resonate to his famous words, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country!" Though the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., has yet to be realized, much of what he spoke strikes a responsive note within the spirit of Boomers. If, during their lifetime, our violent world has eliminated the leaders just mentioned and Senator Robert F. Kennedy as well, Boomers are not without heroes, and much of their music packs powerful messages of love, hope, despair, self-sacrifice. They want their lives to make a difference in the world. They care about the legacy they are leaving their children. Many who would not claim to be religious would insist that they are on a spiritual quest.

Where have all the Boomers gone? Those returning to the church are going to congregations which are meeting their needs and which appreciate their gifts. They tend to choose large congregations offering a variety of activities, worship times, small groups, and quality worship experiences including strong preaching and adult education courses. Smaller congregations can attract them if they strive for excellence in the ministries they offer.

While writing I thought of the words of Paul to the Corinthians:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. . . . So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us (2 Corinthians 5:16-20).

Standing at the baptismal font baptizing a young Boomer recently, my eyes filled with tears as I considered the route through which this person became a believer. A person who is important to me leads our Tuesday night basketball program. He invited to worship an unchurched friend who played basketball. That young man became active in our congregation, and invited the person I was baptizing to church after a discussion in their office about a problem she had. That is the way it works: one Boomer inviting another Boomer inviting another Boomer.

If Jesus were dying for the sins of the world today, he would be a Boomer. I have no idea why God so foolishly ordained that we human beings are the ambassadors through whom God will offer grace, salvation, and righteousness to the world. But God did that. Think of it. Baby Boomers are the largest group in the world today with the potential of becoming ambassadors for Christ. We have a Baby Boomer as President of the United States of America who says unashamedly that his Christian faith informs his decisions.

It is indeed a "new day." Does the church have the heart to regard people from a point of view which transcends old stereotypes and finds Christ in Boomers? Better yet, can congregations celebrate newness, craft new wineskins, receive new blessings from the most populous, intelligent, resourceful people alive? It will not take long to find the answer to that question. In truth, we do not have long to determine the answer to that question. It is Jesus who asks, "Where have all the Boomers gone?" Changing congregational ministry to meet the almost insatiable spiritual thirst of the Boomer generation is probably what God had in mind for the church of today to be doing all along.

Baby Boomers are the largest group in the world today with the potential of becoming ambassadors for Christ

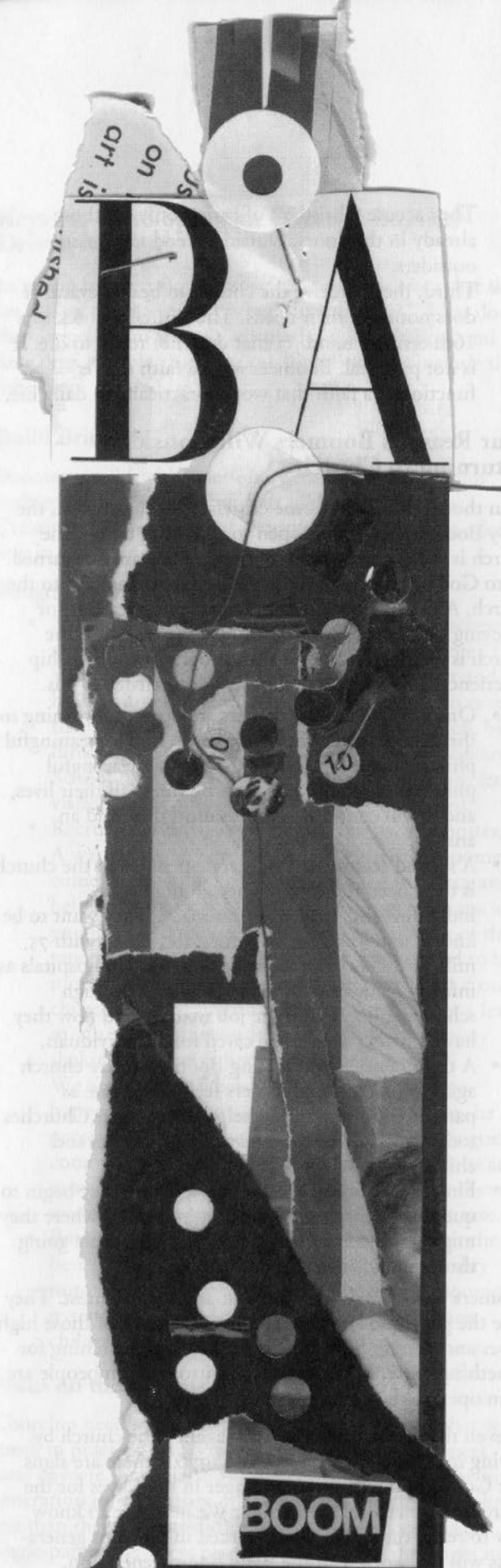
DESIGNING A BOOMER-DRIVEN CHURCH

by Walt Kallestad and Tim Wright

Dr. Walt Kallestad is the Senior Pastor and the Reverend Tim Wright serves as the Executive Pastor of Community Church of Joy, Glendale, Arizona

Station Wagons. Mini-Vans. Fast Food Restaurants. Slinkies. Hula hoops. Silly Putty. Suburbs. Health Clubs. Health Foods. The resurgence of Disney. They all have one thing in common: they all trace their roots to the most unique generation of people ever born in the history of our country—the Baby Boom Generation.

Born between 1946 and 1964, the Baby Boom generation is the largest, most educated generation ever. Numbering 75 million strong, this generation of people has shaped our culture, fashions, and style of living, and they will continue to do so for years to come. As they now move into mid-life, they also represent one of the most reachable generations for Christ. However, when it comes to Boomers, the church can no longer do business as usual. For what reached previous generations will not reach Baby Boomers.



Ministry Shapers

Several factors, fueled by the Baby Boom generation, have changed the way the church can do ministry today. Three of the most important are:

Television

Boomers were the first generation raised on television. It forced them to grow up quickly, seeing the adult world vividly in a way no previous generation had. Through television they witnessed the Viet Nam war, the Civil Rights riots, the assassinations of JFK, RFK, and MLK. Those visual images forced them as children to deal with issues and concerns usually reserved for adults.

Television also created a visually-oriented society. While previous generations were audio-oriented due to the influence of radio, Boomers enjoyed a world of sound and pictures. Information was received and processed at an increasingly rapid rate, with commercials lasting for 10-15 seconds. Attention spans have changed. Slow moving services with long, drawn out dead spots no longer hold the attention of Boomers. Being a television generation they insist on high quality, fast-paced, energetic services.

Music

During the 1960's and 1970's many young people rebelled against anything and everything traditional. Refusing to trust anyone over 30, they rejected the values of the past. They replaced Christianity with Eastern religions and the New Age movement. They exchanged democracy with socialist ideas. They opted to live together outside of marriage rather than marry. They reshaped childbearing with the advent of the pill and other new forms of birth control. They traded in suits and ties for long hair and ragged bell bottom jeans. They turned their backs on classical music and replaced it with a brand new sound: Rock and Roll.

Rock and roll rallied Boomers in the 1960's and 1970's. It fueled their rebellion. It not only reflected their values, it shaped them. Rock offered young Boomers a common voice. It spoke their language and gave vent to their concerns. Contemporary music was and is the uniting force behind this unique generation.

Non-traditional lifestyles continue to impact culture and ministry. So does this non-traditional music. Rock and Roll, in some form or another, is here to stay. Contemporary music, pop, rock and roll, country western, and rap, continues to be the heart music of today's generations. They will rock and roll to their graves. They will not mature into classical music!

Boomers are not listening to organ music on their way to

and from work. Nor are most of them listening to classical music. In fact, only two percent of all music sold in our country is classical. And yet the overwhelming majority of mainline churches uses only classical music in their worship services, which means the overwhelming majority of mainline churches is targeting two percent of the population.

As Boomers shop for a church, they look for congregations that value them by valuing their music. In designing worship services attractive to today's consumers, no other factor has greater impact than the choice of music.

Affluence

Another important factor in molding and shaping the Boomer generation was affluence. Raised by parents who vowed never to let their children face the pain of a depression, Baby Boomers enjoyed the benefits of prosperity. And that affluence shaped their view of life. Where people under economic pressure think about jobs and money, people raised in affluence generally turn their attention to the search for a meaningful philosophy of life.

They tried to find that meaningful philosophy of life in the protests of the 1960's. In the 1970's, the "Me-Decade," they turned inward trying to find meaning within themselves. Coming up empty once again, they looked for meaning in the success and consumption of the 1980's. In the 1990's the search continues. And though the word is still out, many suggest that the 1990's could be a decade of spiritual revival as Boomers move into mid-life and begin to re-evaluate their lives.

That search for meaning has made them highly pragmatic. More than a quest for truth, Boomers are looking for relevance. Does the Gospel work? Can it make a difference in my life? Can it help me be a better parent, boss, employee, person? Can it help me be a better manager of my finances? Can it fill the emptiness and give my life purpose?

Theological pronouncements and religious dogmas will not capture and hold this generation. Boomers want a practical, relevant presentation of the Gospel, a proclamation that can make a difference in their everyday lives.

Three Reasons Boomers Stay Away from the Church

Several surveys have identified what turns off Boomers to the church.

- First, the Baby Boom generation perceives the church to be boring. The worship services are too slow. The music lacks sparkle. The sermons are dull. There are too many dead spots.
- Second, they perceive the church to be unfriendly.

They accuse Christians of caring only for those already in the doors. Outsiders tend to remain outsiders.

- Third, they perceive the church to be irrelevant. It does not meet their needs. The church is stuck in a 16th century mind set that does not relate to life. It is not practical. Boomers want a faith that is functional, a faith that works practically in daily life.

Four Reasons Boomers Will Consider Returning to Church

Even though they have some criticisms of the church, the Baby Boom generation is open to exploring faith if the church is willing to be open to them. They are not turned off to God or even Jesus Christ. They are turned off to the church. And yet, there are some compelling reasons for believing that Boomers will return to the church if the church is willing to respond with programs and worship experiences that speak to Boomers and their felt needs.

- One of the reasons Boomers are open to returning to the church is that they have yet to find a meaningful philosophy of life. That search for a meaningful philosophy of life has driven Boomers all their lives, and it will continue to do so until they find an answer.
- A second reason for Boomers' openness to the church is their need to belong. Though highly individualistic, they crave intimacy. They want to be known and loved for who they are. Along with 75 million others, they were herded through hospitals as infants, grade schools as elementary kids, high schools, colleges, and the job market, and now they have a strong need to be cared for as individuals.
- A third concern motivating Boomers to try church again is parenting. Boomers feel inadequate as parents and want all the help they can get. Churches today will do well to invest time in parents and children.
- Finally, as Boomers move into mid-life they begin to question their present position in life and where they might be headed. Imagine 75 million people going through mid-life crisis at the same time!

Boomers were raised to be the best and the brightest. They were the generation of expectations. But most of those high hopes and dreams have gone bust. They are searching for something more. In such times of introspection people are often open to the Gospel.

So even though Boomers rebelled against the church by leaving in droves in the 1960's and 1970's, there are signs that God is bringing about a hunger in their lives for the church. Boomers can be reached. We just have to know how to reach them. For what worked in previous generations will not work with the Baby Boom generation.

Keys for Developing an Effective Boomer-Driven Ministry

In trying to reach Boomers we need to remember that they are asking the question, "What's in it for me?" What does the Gospel say to them, their needs, and their lives, and how does it apply? Keys for reaching Boomers include the following:

Build Bridges

Boomers are a highly relational generation. They enjoy high-touch in the midst of their high-tech lifestyles. Creating an atmosphere of warmth and care will go a long way in winning them.

Bridges can be built in the following ways:

- Make the campus visitor-friendly. Most churches assume those who come have been there before. The lack of signs proves this. If we want to attract and hold visitors, we need to go out of our way to ensure that they can find their way around the church. Signs directing people to restrooms, the nursery, Sunday School rooms, the Worship Center, and so on, let visitors know they are expected and welcomed.
- Recruit friendly ushers, greeters, hosts, and hostesses. A warm, friendly greeting or handshake as Boomers come to church helps fill the need for intimacy and belonging many of them crave. Several years ago a young man came up to one of us in the back of the sanctuary. He was visibly shaking and seemed to be in some kind of emotional distress. He asked if our church did weddings for non-members. After a few minutes of discussion he said, "Please forgive my shaking. I've never been in a church before." We are not sure what he thought was going to happen to him in church, but whatever it was, he perceived it would be something awful. Many guests come to church the same way. They are anxious and unsure of themselves or what may happen to them. A warm, friendly greeting can help put them at ease.
- Provide a high-quality nursery. Boomers want the best for their children. A clean, safe, high-quality nursery, staffed by responsible adults, puts Boomer parents at ease and values them by valuing their children.

Focus on their Needs

Churches need to creatively design new programs that will speak in practical terms to the everyday needs Boomers face: daycare, financial management (Boomers are the first generation in the history of our country to actually make less than their parents did), divorce recovery, marriage, single-parenting, stress management, and so on. Right now,

and for the next several years, child care, parenting, and (can you believe this?) grandparenting issues will be the hot buttons for Boomers. Churches that seek to provide practical help in these areas will reach many of them.

Offer Choices

Boomers have a shopping mall mentality—they are used to getting it all in one stop. Churches need to present a variety of experiences for Boomers, offering something for everyone. Two different styles of worship on a Sunday morning is one way to meet the unique needs of Boomers.

Develop Strong Teaching Ministries

Boomers, being highly educated, enjoy learning. But they want teaching that is fiercely practical in its content. If it does not work in everyday life, they are not interested. Bible studies will not reach them as effectively as need-oriented seminars which, in practical ways, will show how the Gospel and the Bible impact life. For example, "A New Look at Leviticus" will probably not draw in many Boomers. But a class or seminar on "How to Make a House a Home" will attract participants. Using the Bible as the text, such a practical, need-oriented class will provide help for Boomers and will show them that the Gospel is relevant.

Providing an easy-to-follow outline of the sermon, with blanks to fill in, gives the message a teaching feel. It also holds the attention of education-minded Boomers.

Update our Worship

Baby Boomers are looking for a new, fresh experience of the Gospel—a worship experience which is not centuries removed from their everyday lives. Many of them want some of the old traditions they grew up with in new settings. Most of the Boomers who have left the church want new, contemporary styles. To reach them we need to use the styles of music to which they are listening.

Boomers, raised on television, are visually and entertainment oriented. In order to reach them through worship, our services need to move more quickly and be more visually attractive, using all of the arts to present the Gospel. (For more discussion on this issue, see *A Community of Joy: How to Create Contemporary Worship* by Tim Wright, being released by Abingdon Press this spring.)

Shape Sermons Around their Needs

Most pastors have been trained to begin their sermon preparation with the text and then relate it to life. Boomers need pastors who will dare to begin with the needs of people and then relate the Gospel to those needs. It is a subtle but powerful difference.

Boomers want to know what difference the Gospel makes in their lives. What does the Gospel say about marriage, abuse, parenting, incest, anxiety, divorce and a host of other issues? Boomers want to know if the Gospel works.

Excel in Excellence

Boomers are accustomed to quality. They place a high premium on excellence and expect such excellence in church. With Boomers, we only get one chance to win them over, so our worship and programming need to be the best that is possible. Using quality musicians, teachers, ushers and greeters, results in quality programming and a more effective Boomer-driven ministry.

Offer a Vision

In spite of their self-reliance Boomers want to make a difference in the world. Even now we are seeing some of the old passion of the 1960's re-emerging in the 1990's. The church needs to offer Baby Boomers practical ways through which they can make a difference in the world. (For more information on excellence and vision, see *Taking the Lead* by Walt Kallestad, being released by Augsburg Fortress this spring.)

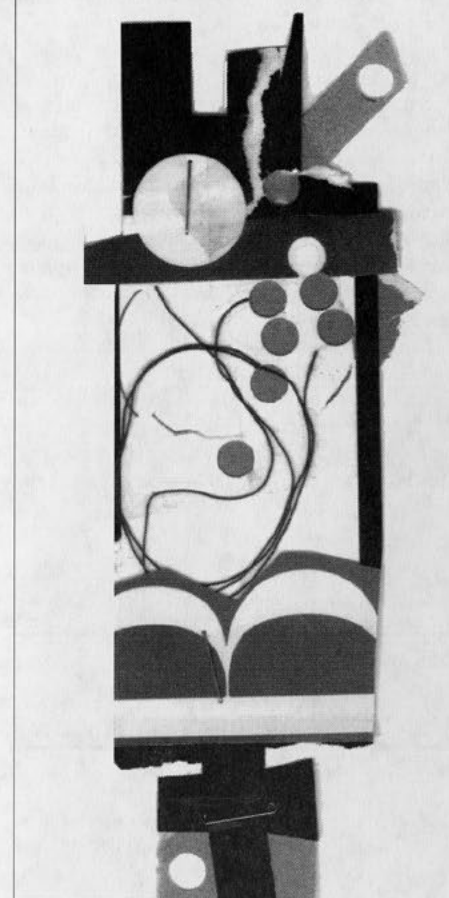
For mainline churches and denominations, the Baby Boom generation has been a largely untapped resource. As Boomers age, as they continue to search for a meaningful philosophy of life, we can either demand that they become like us before we accept them, or we can discover their uniquenesses and design new ways to reach them with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Boomers are searching. The Church has what they are searching for. Our challenge is to find new, creative ways to share the answer to their search with them.

For Further Reading

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- Roof, Wade Clark. *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
- Russell, Cheryl. *The Master Trend: How the Baby Boom Generation is Remaking America*. New York: Plenum Press, 1993.

book reviews



THE MASTER TREND: HOW THE BABY BOOM GENERATION IS REMAKING AMERICA by Cheryl Russell. New York: Plenum Publishing Corporation, 1993.

Half the adult population of this country was born during the Baby Boom. By their sheer number, Boomers have shaped America's self-perception.

They were in their teens and twenties in the 1960's. We remember it as the age of rebellion.

In the 1970's they were moving from one entry-level job to the next like birds hopping from branch to branch, and we called it the decade of uncertainty.

Established and secure in the 1980's, their paychecks were large, their children were small, and glamour, greed, and speed defined their dreams.

And now in the 1990's they are middle-aged, mortgaged, mired in obligations, feeling trapped and tired while the country, in massive mid-life crisis, cries desperately for a change... any change. Propertied people about to send their own children out into the world care deeply about crime, and an aging population with aged parents demands health care reform. The hot topics are predictable.

If this assessment is anywhere near the truth, wisdom dictates the next logical step: identify the next stage of aging the Boomers will enter, and predict the effect this will have on American culture. Cheryl Russell has written a book which attempts exactly that.

Any single theory which explains the fall of the Berlin Wall, the teetering of Amtrak and volunteer fire departments, and the record rise in abortion, divorce and crime is likely to have come from a simpleton, a charlatan, or a demagogue. This one was written by a demographer. A Boomer herself, Russell notes that the most significant fact about the Boomers is not their overwhelming number. It is rather that they are the first generation of "Free Agents," who "see and relate to the world as individuals rather than as family or community members." (page 33). Free Agents play by their own rules, and live in a personalized economy where relationships are not as important as results, where no one is dependent on anyone else, where the new Trinity is Choice, Privacy, and Self-Interest. And this is just the first generation of Free Agents. The Boomers have raised a generation of children who are still more independent than they.

This is an insightful and practical book, especially helpful in examining what these trends are doing to schools, churches, societal ethics, and the family. To sharpen your focus on what is, and lift your eyes to what is likely to come, read this book.

Greg Mech

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A GENERATION OF SEEKERS: THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS OF THE BABY BOOM GENERATION by Wade Clark Roof. San Francisco: Harper, 1993.

Generations are like small children. They toddle upright and are convinced that they and they alone are at the center of the universe. They refuse to acknowledge that they are not infinitely new creations—that they are equally the product of their parents, the sum of many preceding generations. They make fists and raise them to what they perceive to be an indifferent and unfriendly world and cry, "I am me, I am no other... you must consider me special and unique."

What makes the Baby Boomers exceptional in

this generational cycle is not so much their credo as their size: they are 76 million strong, roughly one-third of the population. As such, even though they have been known by a handful of stereotypes, they really defy simple generalization. Roof attempts to do what many have done before... tell us something new about the most analyzed generation of all times. Structurally, he uses a style of relying on personal accounts by specific individuals, popularized by the likes of Studs Terkel in *Working* and used with great effect more recently by Bellah and his associates in *Habits of the Heart*. Roof intersperses personal accounts with his statistical tables saying in effect, "Look, real people feel this way."

Roof observes that the Baby Boomers have had advantages not given to previous generations nor perhaps available to the generations that follow. Their parents, still imbued with the work ethic, provided their Baby Boomer children with amenities they had done without; their children would have what they lacked. Truly the only thing Baby Boomers were deprived of was deprivation. With the basics covered, Boomers were freed to examine those around them in the sixties (sociology), study themselves in the seventies (psychology and religion) and focus on accumulation of wealth in the eighties (business). Self-actualization rather than self-denial became the guiding ethic.

Baby Boomers are the most "schooled" generation; twice as many Baby Boomers went to college as their parents. They felt competent to challenge prevailing norms, they had readily available time and resources, and they had the force of numbers behind them. They dabbled in a variety of non-traditional religious expressions, becoming the established church's "missing generation." They desired to find a personal spiritual path in the midst of numerous alternatives. Instead of following a church's instruction, they felt it their birth-right to shop around for a church that would respond to their whims. Why shape yourself to an institution when you were big enough to force institutions to shape themselves to you? As a result, God is alive, but national church denominations in the United States are dying.

Though Roof's account of Baby Boomers and their spiritual quest is highly informative, very little new will be discovered that has not already been covered in other publications. In a sense, it reminds one of the common church committee plaint: everything has been said, but not everyone has said it yet. Roof can now add his name to the burgeoning list of Baby Boomer authors. Why cannot someone write about the "notch babies" for a change?

Robert P. Hennig

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(continued from page 23)

THE TEACHING CHURCH: MOVING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TO CENTER STAGE by Eugene C. Roehlkepartain. Foreword by Donald L. Griggs. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

This book is an essential resource for both church professionals and lay leaders involved in a congregation's Christian education program. It formulates major goals for Christian education and presents helpful guidelines for achieving those goals, while allowing a congregation to maintain the integrity of its own identity.

Roehlkepartain's work grows out of the massive study of five mainline Protestant denominations conducted by the Search Institute, *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*. This study utilized certain basic assumptions. One, faith is a way of living; it is not just assent to doctrines. Faith transforms life. Two, the primary goal of a congregation is to nurture such faith in order to empower its members for ministry. Thus, Christian education cannot be limited to learning stories and information. Three, faith maturity can be measured in levels ranging from trust and believing to advocating and working for social change.

The study revealed that the level of faith maturity was distressingly low; only 32 percent of adults from the surveyed denominations had a mature faith. The study also asserts that a congregation's formal Christian education program is the most important single influence on faith maturity. Other factors—the sense of family in a congregation, a thinking climate, quality of worship, service to

others, and a warm climate—encourage faith maturity, but to a far lesser extent than does Christian education.

What factors, then, contribute to a life-transforming Christian education program? The author describes these key factors, especially as they pertain to adolescents and adults. Congregations must set a direction for Christian education, working to achieve goals which flow from a mission statement. Small study groups which offer a sense of personal warmth and community are important at all age levels. Effective teachers are those who have high levels of faith maturity and who understand educational theory and practice. Among adults responsibility for learning shifts from the teacher to the learner. Effective educational programs utilize life experiences of their members to gain spiritual insight. They encourage independent thinking and questioning. Congregations must provide regular service opportunities. Finally, families must nurture the faith.

The vision proposed by Roehlkepartain is exciting and solidly biblical. Our faith should revolutionize how we think and live. When the Church, which is the body of Christ, models His life and carries out His ministry, it can transform society. This book is a rich tool for working toward this challenging goal.

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