

ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Summer 2014

Vol. 47, No. 3



OLDER Adults: STEWARDS of the CHURCH'S FUTURE

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A PUBLICATION OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, SEWARD, NEBRASKA

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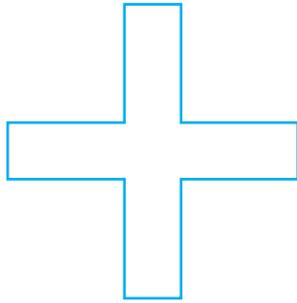
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CONCORDESIGN STUDIO
A Student + Faculty Design Collaborative

Layout, design and illustration by CONCORDESIGN of Concordia University, Seward, Nebraska.
Artist: Seth A. Boggs, M.F.A.

TYPEFACES USED IN THIS PERIODICAL
Titles set in 22 point Mrs. Eaves Roman (Emigre of Sacramento). Tracking normal.
Subheads set in 13/13 point Mrs. Eaves bold.
By-lines and author information set in 13/13 point Mrs. Eaves small caps.
Footers and folios set in 11 point Mrs. Eaves.
Feature articles set in 11/13 point Mrs. Eaves.
Three column text set in 9/10 point Mrs. Eaves.

reflections

The Psalmist wrote: “Now that I am old and gray, do not abandon me, O God. Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me.” (Psalm 71:18 NLT)

In June, because her pastor was on vacation and unable to return home, I officiated the funeral service of my aunt and godmother, Caroline, who died at the age of 88. The theme of the homily was “On the Go.” Throughout her life and until the end of her life, Aunt Caroline was “on the go” for her family, for others in her congregation and community, and for her Lord! My father referred to his sister as “the energizer bunny.” That she was!

The attributions of family, friends, neighbors, congregants and her pastor all attested to the way in which Aunt Caroline lived her life as a steward of the faith that filled her. In the days leading up to her funeral service, I received many examples of how she faithfully—even in the last weeks of her life—gave to, prayed for, taught, helped, called upon and assisted others. She did so in joyful response to all the abundant gifts and blessings God had given her, beginning with her baptism at six days of age, and continuing throughout her life, especially in the study of God’s Word and the reception of His Body and Blood in the Lord’s Supper to the very end of her life.

What most inspired me about the witness of Aunt Caroline’s life was her determination—even when she was “old and gray”—to practice and proclaim the love of God in Christ Jesus to the next generation. Her confirmation verse was John 6:68: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” All of Aunt Caroline’s on-the-go-ness was marked by the fact that as she was on the go for others, she was, by God’s grace, on the way to Jesus. Her life was a humble life, well lived in the three estates of home, church and state (Biermann), that modeled “the joy and fullness that Jesus offers” (Keurulainen), and that was “future-oriented” and deeply “invested in her local church’s preferable future” (Mueller).

This edition of *Issues in Christian Education* is much more than a celebration of aging or old-er adults (Mueller). It serves as both a powerful reminder and joyful encouragement that

Stewardship is not something that is ever complete, at least not as long as life remains. While vocations change with age, and the ability to meet the demands of certain careers may wane and then evaporate altogether, Christians never retire from their vocations. They never stop living as good stewards. They never quit doing the thing that God calls them to do. As an older adult, that *thing* is working with deliberate effort to insure the successful transmission of God’s truth and the way of life that honors that truth from one generation to the next. This work is never done. Indeed, a Christian’s work is never done. Don’t aim at resting. Aim at doing what God gives you to do while you’re able to do it. Don’t worry; the time for a long quiet rest eventually will come to each of us. (Biermann)

May God bless our *lifelong* service offered for others in His name.

Brian L. Friedrich, President

The Change of the Age

Historically, older adults have passed along their knowledge to younger generations, who in turn grew in their knowledge, faith, and wisdom. This cycle was repeated generationally. One of the largest generations in history is reaching the “third age,” or the ages of sixty to ninety—the Baby Boomers. Because this generation is so large, spanning the years of 1946 to 1964, this movement is going to go on for some time to come. How can the church harness the time, talent, and treasure of what is said to be one of our greatest natural resources, the aging Boomer? The answer is both simple and complicated.

One of the characteristics of the Baby Boomer is that of involvement. Looking back, this generation has been known for activism, change, and involvement. These characteristics will not drastically change as the Boomers move into old age. One way to harness this desire to be involved is to encourage them to take on important projects for the church. The church has a cafeteria of talent in this generation just waiting to be selected for their unique wisdom, skill, or ability, and become part of a balanced team. What a joyful smorgasbord of talent exists in each of our churches.

One might ask, “If all of this talent is available in the aging population of the church, why isn’t there more involvement?” The answer, as strange as it may seem, is that many individuals haven’t been asked. Yes, that’s right; they are waiting for you to ask them to do something that matches their skill, talent, or interest. This is where the answer gets complicated. Let me try to explain. If individuals in your church don’t share what their interests are, it might be because no one has ever bothered to take the time to ask. Why don’t they get asked? The answer is because, in our hurry-up world of cell phones and texting, the art of conversation and relationship building is getting lost. Attending church has become another box to be checked off: walk in, participate in worship, shake the pastor’s hand, head to the car, and on to the next event. Learning about your fellow congregational members has turned into an Internet search rather than a personal interaction.

So, what is the answer? Engage with your fellow worshippers. Take the time to learn about them by talking to them. Establish an environment where ideas are welcomed, where personal relationships are celebrated, and where creativity is accepted. Once this environment is fostered, these relationships will generate an explosion of involvement. Don’t allow your congregation to get stuck in the old rut of “It’s been done this way for thirty years, so why change?”

Baby Boomers are often called the Change Generation because they changed every segment of society as they have moved through their life course. Embrace this change-mentality, not just for the sake of change, but to improve and expand the outreach of the church in any number of ways. Some of these outreach ideas that are more common including mentoring the younger generation into leadership positions, sharing intellect and wisdom with a pre-teen Sunday School class, and teaching a skill to a group of interested adults. But what about reaching well beyond the church walls by representing the church through community involvement, such as sponsoring a young adult on a mission trip, or initiating a monthly healthy-cooking class, jewelry-making course, or writer’s club led by older adults but open to all members, including the larger community. The talent that exists can determine what opportunities should be offered. When there is excitement generated by helping to turn an idea into reality, support will come in many ways, including financial.

A great intergenerational project, often overlooked in a church setting, is that of creating a spiritual legacy or life review for the church and its members. There is such a wealth of experiences within the older population. They embody history. More often than not, the history and those unique experiences will go with them to their graves because no one has taken the time to listen to their stories and write them down.

One of my most meaningful experiences was when I had the opportunity to work with the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. Listening to the stories of World War II veterans and their spouses was priceless

and something I will never forget. If I had not gotten their stories, they would have died with them. As a result of my experience, one of the assignments in my gerontology classes is a life review with an older adult. When it is complete, the review is given back to the older adult and their family. That intergenerational assignment is consistently ranked highest by students as having been most meaningful and life changing. I have had children of the interviewees tell me that it meant so much to their mom or dad to go through this process. Many of our congregations’ histories are carried by church members whose stories are unique and meaningful. Creating an opportunity to capture these stories and histories also will be priceless for future generations.

As Baby Boomers retire from their careers, time becomes a more plentiful commodity. Because they have been accustomed to the rush of the working world, after a few months enjoying the initial freedom of retirement, individuals find themselves looking for ways to re-engage. Some choose to look for part-time work, but many will move into volunteerism. The key for the retired Baby Boomer is flexibility. Offer opportunities for time-specific involvement, and, after the project is completed, don’t forget to say “Thank you!”

Appreciation of this offering of gifts is another step in harnessing the power that exists within this generation. Acknowledge the efforts of the individuals who step up into leadership, mentoring opportunities, skilled craftsmanship efforts, or financial contributor roles. While all that we do is done to the glory of God, Hebrews 10:25 states: “Let us encourage one another ...”. Everyone likes to feel that what they have done is appreciated; it encourages continued involvement.

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I've Put in My Time!

In my tenure in the parish, I have heard few responses from older adults that puzzle me more than this one: "I've put in my time." And they are very serious. There is no way that they'll consider helping with whatever this or that opportunity because they have "done it before." Now, being the practical fool I am, I want to respond, "Great, you're experienced and will be awesome!" However, I would not want to end my request prematurely!

Thus, the impasse.

The impasse is the point where older adults have determined that they have contributed enough to the church and are unwilling (aside from financial support) to continue giving. However, the congregation needs their experience. Trust me, my background in gerontology and everyday encounters with aging people do not mean that I disregard legitimate excuses. But all too often, "I've put in my time," is just a statement made because of busyness. I have thought of this normal response as a type of "ministry euthanasia." Either someone has given of their time when they were younger or we, unknowingly at times, decide someone is too old or not able to assist with "the young ones." We or they act as if their gifts and talents have ceased to have value and should be pruned out of the tapestry of the church or school.

The crux of the matter, though, is precisely the focus this edition of *Issues* directs us to think of older adults as stewards of the church's future. What's more, they are the stewards of the church *now*. For the sake of discussion, let's consider the church's youth as one of those opportunities for the ministry of older adults. (I am referring to "youth" as any one person who is newly born through their mid-twenties.) So, what value might older adults have for youth? A lot.

You see, the simple quip that "I've put in my time" is itself the rich gift that an older adult brings to the parish or school setting. They have *time*. I am not advocating that every moment of retirement or later years should be devoted to giving back, but many members who are the upcoming Boomers *will* have some time that they can give. And not just time, but experience. And not just experience, but wisdom. And not just wisdom, but often a lifetime lived in the Gospel.

As an educator and Director of Christian Education, I know that the world is a classroom. Every experience and opportunity can be a point at which a young person grows, learns, questions and challenges. These formative experiences are HUGE! Why not bring those older adults into the mix?

Practically speaking, this will look different in different contexts, but I want to illustrate the rich and abundant possibilities of how older adults *must* be a part of sharing the Gospel and Christ's love with the next generation of Christian adults (that's the current youth). We have seen first-hand and in research the devastating impact of youth leaving the church. Yet, simple steps might be a start to circumventing that treacherous end. I heard David Kinnaman, president and majority owner of Barna Group, speak recently at a conference. He shared a term I had not heard before, but the concept is something I have known about and greatly praise. He advocates "vocational camps"—not vocation as occupation but as our call (Latin: *vocatio*) to faith and to living out our faith across the life span.

The nature of a "vocational camp" is this: an older, wiser, more experienced person shares time, company, and learning with a youth. Kinnaman says this is about intentionally bringing youth together with mature Christian men and women who have lived out their Christian faith in their various life contexts, letting their faith fully impact their vocations as parents, employees, employers, members of their extended families, Christians in their communities, and members of their congregations. More than grandparent days in our schools and godparent groups, the vocational camp conveys what Jane Fryar in her book, *Go and Make Disciples*, eloquently describes as Christ's model of a disciple: It was all-encompassing. It was thorough. It was holistic. It was looking to the future. It was about being a good steward and investing. As valuable as grandparent days and godparent groups are, we're talking about more than what these provide.

It is imperative that such spiritual formation is carried out in our churches and our schools. As faithful Christian teachers, we are called upon to be the catalysts, the

advocates, even the rabble-rousers for a shift that might better pass on the faith. While we want to sustain the important role of home and immediate family, we also know that additional Christian adults in the lives of our youth are crucial (cf. 1 John 2:12-14). And this is certainly one way that older adults can and should fit in.

It is hard to ignore the glaring reality that the Boomers are getting older. Just as rapidly as, decades ago, they hit the birthing units, our schools, and our youth groups, they are hitting their retired years. Or, as we would prefer, their re-fired years. If you know a Boomer or two, you might find that they have no desire to be called "old" and certainly not "elderly." These "older adults" are living, working, and—we intend—serving much later in their lives than previous generations. And, though they might state they have, "Put in their time," they have so much to offer! They are the ones who can be sharing their vocation (remember—that's the active Christian life, not merely occupation) experiences with our youth. They are the ones who have lived life and can now be stewards of what God has given them (time, talents and treasures) to build up our churches and schools for the future.

So, let me leave you with this: How is God calling you to prepare and equip older adults in your midst to reinvest in the life of youth in your church or school? Is it a team of older adults who walk alongside first-time parents all the way until the child is one year old? Might it be having an "Older Adult of the Week" in your elementary school who is with students daily, reads to students, prays with students, and shares how God was present in her or his younger years? Could it be an older adult who absolutely loves sports, has great stories and jokes, and could spend time with your middle-level students while getting to know their struggles? Or, is it an older adult who teaches crucial life preparation modules with your high school group so that these soon-to-be adults are better equipped for things like buying a car, balancing a checkbook, getting an education grant or loan, renting an apartment, and leaving the nest? In the congregation that proclaims and practices the love of Christ, well, the possibilities seem endless.

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Older Adulthood, A Time For ...

SEEING the extraordinary blessing of living in this century. In the midst of aches and pains, medications, surgeries, cancer treatments, arrhythmias, and a host of other health issues, that more adults are:

- living longer, are healthier, have access to greater medical care and medications
- are given more time, enjoy higher standards of living, have more financial resources
- are more mobile and can make more choices

than any other generation in the history of humankind causes one to wonder, "Why? Why us?" A short answer: one is blessed to serve God's creations and creatures who live in a terminal universe.

ENGAGING in new experiences. Today, older adults are:

- exploring the miracles of God's creation, forming new relationships
- spending more time with family, mentoring, and re-discovering the meaning of play
- getting a new job, refurbishing church and school campuses, and investing time in a caring ministry
- using one's brain in challenging activities, learning a language for outreach and becoming involved in community activities
- leading new ministries in congregations (such as older adult ministry) and searching for something to retire to
- developing new paradigms which see opportunities for mission and ministry in our cities, towns, villages and rural areas instead of reflecting a "doom and gloom" attitude based on shrinking numbers or saying, "Let the younger ones do it."

REMEMBERING the sacrifices of one's parents and grandparents who provided a faith foundation which has been the anchor

of one's life. Their investments, modeling, and teaching led to the formation of attitudes, values, beliefs, perspectives, habits, and faith. They affirmed and supported getting an education which further equipped one for service in church and society. Remembering what one has received from family and educators promotes a desire to strengthen the lives of younger families and to expand educational opportunities for the coming generations.

BEING INTENTIONAL in passing on the faith to the generations. Grandparents who invest time and energy in developing relationships with their grandchildren are given multiple opportunities to focus on faith events, share faith stories, reflect on the meanings of life-cycle events, highlight the important events of the church year, and ponder the meanings of biblical narratives. One grandparent connects with pre-adolescent grandchildren who are separated by distance by reading Bible stories and discussing life applications on FaceTime.

PAYING ATTENTION to young people, especially the Millennials. When surveys report that significant numbers of young adults are disengaged from the church, one can remember that being disengaged may be the result of searching for answers to big questions and of even dealing with doubts about the Christian faith. As a recent study revealed, few young adults are discussing their doubts and/or feelings of insecurity, fear, and loneliness with anyone. An older adult who takes the time to walk with a younger person who is struggling can make a big difference.

RESPONDING TO CRISES that need to be addressed. One crisis is the amount of indebtedness being carried by pastors and teachers in the LCMS who are graduating from seminaries and universities. As a recent study made by one of our seminaries reported, 28 percent of their most recent graduates began their ministries with at

least \$60,000 in educational debt. Some left the seminary with an indebtedness of more than \$100,000. More than 25 percent of the graduates expected to retire their educational debts over a period of more than twenty years. We remember that in a less complex era our ancestors developed a higher education system that enabled one to graduate with zero indebtedness. Older adults need to step up and lead congregations to help these graduates repay their loans. Are there resources? In a few short years, the two older generations will be passing on trillions of dollars to the next generations.

COLLABORATING WITH members of all generations to engage in service. Two examples in the State of Nebraska can be cited. There are approximately 238,000 people in the state who help their parents, spouses and other loved ones stay at home by providing assistance. (In coming years, the need for in-home assistance by relatives, friends, church members, and neighbors will increase dramatically.) One week after two tornadoes demolished much of the town of Pilger, Nebraska, 2,000 adults of all ages gathered on one day to assist residents of the community.

ASKING, "What's the motivation for...?" Investing time, energy, and financial resources in one's opportunities reflects the key mark of God's character, that of giving, evident in the gift of His Son. Through eyes of faith, one sees God's continuing giving in older adulthood as a time for...

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You Can Rest Later: Older Adults—Stewards of God's Gifts

Using the words, *older adults* and *stewards*, together in a title, even just a subtitle, seems a sure way to ward off all but the most determined readers. No one likes to think too much about growing old (though as the standard joke goes, it certainly beats the alternative), and the idea of stewardship has been saddled with notorious associations of duties to be done and the forfeiture of money. Since you have so far overcome these deterrents, though, and made it to this point unscathed, I encourage you to press forward. I will indeed discuss stewardship—particularly the stewardship of “older adults” (who, of course, must always be someone other than the author or reader). My hope though is to carry out this work along paths that I suspect may not be entirely familiar. And before the end is reached, perhaps there even may be some gain for the reader, regardless her age, and, more importantly, some gain for our Lord's church.

There's no doubt that the church, today, would be well served if more of her people spent a bit more time thinking about stewardship. She would be still better served, however, if more of her people spent more time thinking about the *church*. A significant problem facing the church in the 21st century is a huge lack of understanding among Christians themselves

about the identity and purpose of the church. It's bad enough that those who are not members of Christ's body have woefully misguided and erroneous ideas about the church. When those *in* the church don't understand, it is not unfortunate ... it is a crisis.

Too often, believers see the church as the place that takes care of those all-important “spiritual” parts of life. Church provides a boost for the week ahead, and gives a person warm feelings of God's presence and promises. Church is the place where one “takes care of things” with God so that when the days of growing older inevitably reach their end, everything is in place for a smooth entry into the next life. From this perspective, church matters, and matters a great deal; but it doesn't have that much to do with the *real* business of living life day-to-day. Church counts for one part of life—albeit, a significant part—but there remain vast swaths of a believer's existence that are essentially untouched by anything related to the church. This is wrong. This way of treating the church violates everything the Bible teaches us about God and his gift that is the church.

Yes, of course, the church does deal with spiritual things and has much to say about eternity. But, there is so much more to the church than that. Christ lived, died, and rose again not just to make it possible for a few fortunate people to go heaven when they die. Christ carried out his work perfectly so that the entire creation could be won back from the futility and corruption foisted upon it by

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rebellious man. Christ fulfilled the Father's will as prescribed in order to reclaim all of his creation and to return the pinnacle of that creation (you and me, and all people, of course) to God's original plan. The church is the place that declares these truths. More than, that, the church is the place that delivers these truths and makes them reality in the lives of God's people. To be part of God's church, then, is to be joined to Christ, to be forgiven and so returned to a right relationship with God, and to be restored for God's purpose and so ready to do the work that God has given you to do even now in this world. The church is about all of life. Nothing is exempt. Nothing is excluded.

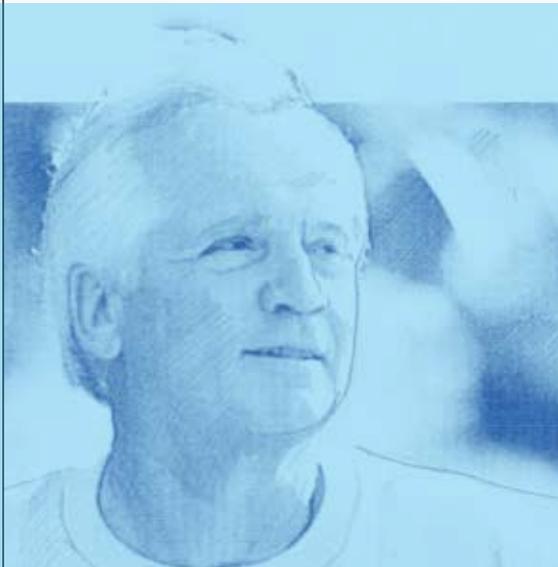
The implications of this biblical, potent, expansive, understanding of Christ and his church are profound. Seen this way, the Christian church is so much more than a clinic for spiritual wholeness or a source of inspiration and insights guaranteed to yield a profitable and meaningful life. And the Christian life is so much more than learning the right set of doctrinal ideas or regularly volunteering and cheerfully offering friendly service with a spiritual twist. Rather, when rightly understood, the Christian life is nothing less than a continuing adventure of bringing every part of ourselves, including every one of our thoughts, and every one of our actions done every day, in line with God's original purpose for his human creatures. All of this is to say that stewardship is, at its core, simply

learning to live in God's all-embracing reality. Stewardship is just the name we give to the Christian's continuing responsibility to live her life in conformity with God's purposes, using every resource in conformity with God's desires for the right functioning of his good creation.

More can be said about what exactly it looks like when a Christian is doing the things he was created and redeemed to do. And, given the amount of wrong-headed thinking that seems to abound these days when it comes to the specifics of Christian ethics (which is merely another term for Christian living or even Christian discipleship), more *needs* to be said. Without getting waylaid by a host of complicating factors that typically swirl around discussions about Christian living, it is enough for our present purpose to trace the trajectory already established in this discussion, and recognize that the point of a Christian's life is to accomplish the things that God has given him to do... and God *has* given him things to do.

Following this route leads directly to the doctrine of vocation, which has happily enjoyed renewed attention in recent years that is both appropriate and long overdue. The idea of vocation is simple: God has intentionally designed each of us for unique purposes within his created world, and then placed us into relationships with other creatures where we carry out those purposes. We heed God's created design and honor his wishes by fulfilling our individual responsibilities as creatures. A moment's reflection will confirm that the bulk of these tasks are wrapped around and into our interactions with family, work, church and state.

When teaching the Christian's life and one's responsibilities in the created world, Martin Luther was fond of making reference to the three estates. In step with the reality of his late medieval world, Luther was able to roll work and family together into a single estate called home. Luther recognized that it was in one of the three estates of home, church, or state—or perhaps in some combination of the three—that people carry out their vocations. It is this understanding that is evident in Luther's "Table of Duties" appended to the Small Catechism. The wide variety of Scriptural texts selected by Luther reflects the diversity of tasks different



people may do—yet all are done within the three estates. Thus, the Christian, Luther was sure, was doing what God wanted her to do when she was faithfully working in the estates of home, church, and state, doing in each the work appropriate to her peculiar station in each estate.

As complicated as this may sound, it is actually quite straightforward and basically self-evident, as a somewhat protracted example amply illustrates. A mother is honoring God and doing exactly what she was created to do when she strives to be a nurturing and guiding parent who cares well for her children. A husband does what is God-pleasing and congruent with his creatureliness when he works honestly and not only serves fellow creatures through his work, but then is also able to provide for the needs of his own family. That same man stays informed about government decisions, pays his taxes, and votes regularly and wisely; and the mother, who is also the man's wife, joins her husband and family faithfully in worship and writing the check each week for their tithe. Both the man and the woman are working within each of the three estates, doing what their varied vocations give them to do. Obviously, the examples are but a small sampling of the many areas of responsibility included in the vocations of people in their everyday lives.

So, what does all of this talk about vocation have to do with stewardship? Much. In fact, this foundation grounded in the doctrine of vocation is essential to a right understanding and practice of stewardship. Seen from the context of our creatureliness and the vocations that we individually have been given, stewardship emerges as little more than the faithful practice of vocation in each of the three estates in which we spend our lives. Stewardship, then, is not so much about managing resources or meeting the needs of the church's annual "stewardship appeal" (a poorly named practice, if ever there was one!). Stewardship is not just a matter of planning an estate or "legacy gift" for maximum impact, or practicing the discipline of tithing. No, stewardship is about living all of life in conformity with God's purposes for his creatures. Stewardship is another name for being faithful with what has been given. This is the driving

point of Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew 25: use what you've been given to do work pleasing to God. In other words, fulfill your vocations. That's what stewardship is all about.

Building from this normative idea, another vital point about stewardship is that it involves so much more than what we do "at church." As a side point, and for the sake of clarity, it's important to notice that in this context, the church, like the home and the state, is also a place of responsibility, an arena within which the creature fulfills his responsibilities for the sake of other creatures—in this case, fellow believers and even unbelievers who benefit from the work of the church. It is certainly understandable if this all begins to seem just a bit confusing. After all, we also know that the church is the place where God delivers his gifts; it is the place where the gospel happens to us. And, the gospel, by definition, is the delightful, exhilarating reality of what God does for us, and not what we must do. The church, then, most certainly is all about giving out the gospel of forgiveness of sins and the restoration of relationship with God. But, at the same time, the church is also most certainly a place where Christians have responsibilities that need to be fulfilled. It is both at once. The Gospel reality does not extinguish the vocational responsibilities we have in the estate we call church. Keeping this in mind, we can now resume considering the idea that stewardship involves more than things related to church.

It seems to be a common notion that stewardship is a church thing. Since stewardship is a word we hear almost exclusively at church, it just makes sense that it must be something that happens only in the context of church. Once again, this is simply wrong. A Christian is redeemed by God to do what she was created to do—to do her vocations. And, as we have seen, there are vocations to be fulfilled at church such as sharing in the divine service, participating in meetings, giving offerings, attending and teaching Bible classes, bringing an abundance to potlucks, and so much more. But, in addition to these, there are also most certainly vocations to be done in the estates of home and state. Preparing your child for the move to college, mowing your lawn, wearing your seatbelt

when you drive, and even volunteering long hours on a political campaign are all aspects of Christian stewardship. No part of your life is excluded. The three estates are meant to be comprehensive; so your responsibility to be a wise and faithful steward includes your vocational tasks in all three estates, which encompass all of life.

All of this means that thinking about a life of stewardship from any perspective, including that of older adults, must touch on much more than tithing, volunteering at church, and making sure to include your home congregation (and maybe even the seminary) in your will. To be a faithful steward of God's gifts means learning to live every part of life in harmony with God's perfect will for the good of other creatures all around you. It is not enough carefully to manage resources whether of money or time. Good stewardship means using all the gifts you have been given, for the good of all those around you, all the time. God stewardship is demanding.

Of course, all of this is true for all Christians. So, what is there that can be said specifically about Christians who have already lived for many years? Is there anything particular about their situation? Are there any vocations unique to older adults? From a scriptural standpoint, the answer is an emphatic, "yes!" To cite but one compelling example, the Apostle Paul provides clear direction and high expectations for those who would be categorized as "elders":

Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, *to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.* Titus 2:2-5 (NASB)

This should not be read as a perfunctory moral entreaty. Paul is encouraging those who have lived long to serve those around them by living a certain way. Without getting mired in the

details of the exegesis, and a host of fascinating ancillary issues, Paul's desire for the men is that they would live lives worthy of the respect that in their cultural context would typically have attended their years. These men were to be stellar examples to all in the church, and to all other people in Crete where Titus was serving, of what it meant to live life as God intended. In other words, they were to act their age and have their act together.

Paul's counsel to the older women is even more interesting and helpful to us. Like the men they should be acting in a way fitting for their years, in this case, being *reverent*. But, the specific admonition from the apostle is that these women should be deliberately and intentionally teaching—presumably by word and example—the younger women how to fulfill their particular vocations as wives and mothers in an excellent way. As far as Paul (and the Holy Spirit) is concerned, a critical task of the older believers is that they are directly and tirelessly working to shape the next generation to take up the mantle and live faithfully in their own day. This is a great and significant work. It surpasses anything else that any man or woman might do in service in any of the three estates. Forming, equipping, training, teaching, correcting, and encouraging those of the younger generation is the essential work of every older adult.

The gift that needs to be used for the sake of fellow creatures in home, church and state, is the gift of experience, coupled with wisdom, humility, and faith made resilient and reliable by many years and many trials. This is the thing that older adults have that people in all three estates critically need. Being a good steward, then, means being committed to making an impact in the generations that follow by using the gifts acquired by older adults by virtue of having lived long. All older adults have these gifts, though their exact content will vary considerably from person to person. All older adults need to recognize their responsibility actively to engage the two or three generations that follow them. Certainly, this is vital in the estate of the home. But, it is every bit as critical in the estates of church and state.

Older adults are not using their gifts well when they "get out of the way" to let the "young

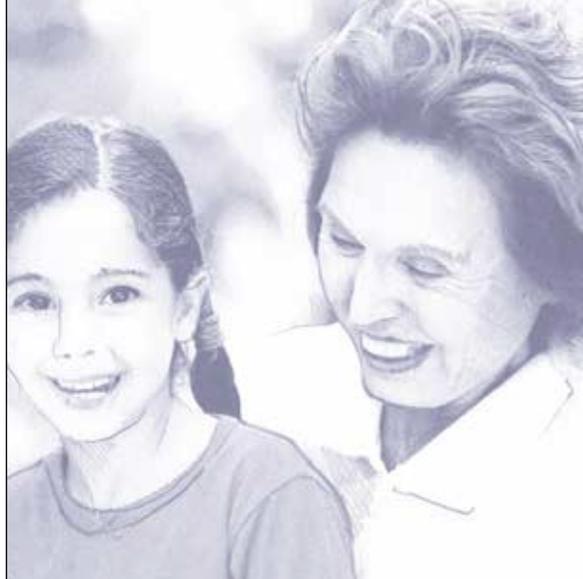
people with all their energy and ideas” take the stage. Nor are adults using their gifts well when they bite their tongues instead of speaking counsel and wisdom to those they see who could benefit from their wisdom. Yes, I am urging men and women who have lived long to share their learning with those who come behind. Of course, some tact and good humor are called for here, but it seems that too often our elders, today, err on the side of saying and doing far too little rather than too much.

Perhaps this all seems rather pedestrian and rudimentary. I sympathize with that assessment. There’s nothing groundbreaking or novel here. Still, I contend that unsophisticated as it may be, the task of shaping those who follow is the essence of what it means to a faithful older adult seeking to fulfill her vocations for the good of those around. Consider one more word from Paul:

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. 1 Corinthians II:1-2 (NASB)

For the apostle, all that he hoped for from those in his congregation in Corinth could be summarized with the exhortation that these believers should imitate him. Obviously, Paul had to be living a life worthy of imitation. So should every older adult in Christ’s church be living in the same way. One who has lived long in the world and in the faith should live in such a way that she can confidently exhort the generations following her, “Do it like I did it.”

Indeed, this is basic, but it is far from trite or superficial. It is the essential lifelong challenge. An elder—that is an older adult—has a responsibility to those he encounters in all three estates. He has a responsibility to live circumspectly, confidently, and with dignity befitting his confession of faith. He has a responsibility to set an example to all others—especially to fellow believers—most especially to younger believers. He has a responsibility to see that God’s reality is being lived and embraced not only in his own life, but also in the lives of the coming generations. This is the ultimate stewardship of gifts that have been given.



Obviously, when considered in this light, stewardship is not something that is ever complete, at least not as long as life remains. While vocations change with age, and the ability to meet the demands of certain careers may wane and then evaporate altogether, Christians never retire from their vocations. They never stop living as good stewards. They never quit doing the thing that God calls them to do. As an older adult, that *thing* is working with deliberate effort to insure the successful transmission of God’s truth and the way of life that honors that truth from one generation to the next. This work is never done. Indeed, a Christian’s work is never done. Don’t aim at resting. Aim at doing what God gives you to do while you’re able to do it. Don’t worry; the time for a long quiet rest eventually will come to each of us....

An expansive stewardship that concentrates on the inculcation of the faith and the transmission of truth from one generation to the next are ambitious and unrelenting goals for God’s people. But it is God’s goal, and worth the pursuit and the price. No doubt such an understanding of stewardship would do much to sharpen and challenge the church’s identity. Such a vision of lifelong stewardship cannot exist in a church content with meeting “spiritual needs” and doing good deeds. A church that can cultivate and sustain the sort of Christians who are committed to such a comprehensive and absolute stewardship of all gifts for the good of all God’s creation would likely bear little resemblance to the perfunctory, superficial, and largely distracted assemblies that today too often pass for the church. Yet, it is precisely for such faithful churches that form such capable Christians—such stewards—that we are all commanded to pray and to work.





Older Stewards are the Future of the Church

As a Sunday School teacher, Gordon was not the flashiest or most interesting person to sit in class with on a Sunday morning. Gordon and I had very little in common; he was old enough to be my father. He crunched numbers, and I enjoyed crunching a baseball with a bat. Yet, as I look back on the years growing up, I consider Gordon to be one of the most influential men in my life.

It is not so much what he said but rather who he was and how he saw me. Like so many ninth graders, I struggled with self-confidence. That is why his invitation to me was astounding, and dare I say, life changing when he asked, “Barry, would you lead the closing worship for our VBS?”

In the scheme of life, some would view this as a simple and nice request. After all, it was not like he was asking me to discover a cure for cancer. But for a ninth grade boy, it opened a door to a new world that would lead me to where I am today. It was more than the invitation; it was that someone believed in me and saw something in me that I did not see at that point.

The book of Psalms says, “They will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green.” (Psalm 92:14) I believe that even though Gordon passed over into glory years ago, his life is still yielding fruit in mine, not only because he saw something in me but because I saw something in him. I saw Jesus in him. I also saw what God wanted me to become.

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That’s it! When one considers the question, “What are the gifts of older stewards that can impact the church’s future?”, the answer is right there—the role and the gift of older stewards are to model what God wants the next generations to become.

This is Paul’s instruction to Titus, “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good so that they may encourage the young women ...” (Titus 2:1-4a)

It is often said, “Youth are the future of the church.” In many ways this is true. However, without older stewards being devoted to living as lifelong learners, the youth will have no model, no vision of what they are to become in that future. What would happen in the church if more people embraced the vision, “Older stewards are the future of the church”?

This vision goes against the thinking of our day. In our culture, once you hit retirement age everything is, as the birthday cards say, “over the hill.” There is little patience or regard for older men and women.

This was reflected on October 29, 1998, at the launching of the space shuttle Discovery. Discovery was launched with a seven-member crew. One of them, John Glenn, had been in space as the first American to orbit the earth in 1962. I remember watching that in school on a black and white TV as a fifth grader. John Glenn became one of my earliest heroes. Thirty-six years later, at the age of seventy-seven, John Glenn was returning to space. TIME magazine had a piece that began, “This is not country for



old men.” A few days before the flight, John Glenn scolded one hundred reporters who had gathered at the launch pad for the crew’s practice countdown. They were focusing too much on his age, he said, rather than the mission’s scientific merits. Why all the fuss about age?

In our culture, when you hit sixty-five, it is time to retire, collect Social Security, move to the side and let the younger folks step in. This kind of thinking develops a mindset that can be crippling to an older adult.

Those myths need to be challenged. The truth is, “The current older population is healthier, wealthier and living longer than ever before,” says Victoria Velkoff of the U.S. Census Bureau. The majority of older adults is self-sufficient, owns seventy-five percent of all American assets and spends half the money. In reality, recent research from the University of Chicago says that older adults are the happiest of any generation. They have come to grips with their accomplishments and failures; they have lowered their expectations of achieving wealth and fame and have discovered the elusive word—contentment.

In order for the church to be healthy in the future, she will need to call on members, especially an expanding group of baby boomers who are retiring at the rate of ten thousand a day, to a biblical view of aging. Rev. Joyce Smothers, who writes for the *Forum on Religion, Spirituality and Aging*, observes that “The church will survive because of, not in spite of, its older members.”

The Scriptures hold a high view of aging. Elders are to be respected, honored and valued as the model of what the next generation is to become. Old age is seen as a sign of God’s

blessing and favor. Years are seen as a gift when the fruit of the aged is still sweet and nourishing to younger generations rather than as a burden to be scorned or ignored.

God loves older adults. God uses older adults at key moments in the narrative He is unfolding. At the age of eighty and eighty-three, God chose Moses and Aaron to lead His people. All but forgotten in the desert, God had a plan for them. Daniel was well over eighty when God used him powerfully in Babylon. Zacharias and Elizabeth and Simeon and Anna do not make it into our manger scenes, and they yet played key roles in the events of the birth of Jesus. Paul refers to himself as “the aged” in Philemon 9 and yet, consider the impact he had in world missions. The word “retire” was not in his vocabulary. “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected, but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” (Philippians 3:12) Oh, and don’t forget Caleb. I want to be Caleb when I get older. In his eighties, Caleb says when they are dividing the Promised Land, “Now give me the hill country...” (Joshua 14:12) Most older adults are looking for homes without steps. Not Caleb, who wanted hill country, the toughest terrain in the Promised Land. He had energy to burn and work to accomplish.

The biblical narrative continues to unfold in the life of the church today. If we desire to reach an increasingly diverse world, we must embrace the value older stewards have within the community of believers where one can be blessed by the sweetness of the fruit they yield in old age.

This means that the church will have to resist the temptation to always try to make itself more appealing to the world through things that are

new. The world we live in loves new—new phones, new cars, new jobs, etc. But are we ignoring the richness of the fruit and life of older believers? Young people understand “passion,” but older people understand “faithfulness.” Young people do not live in a world where they know what it is like to remain in one group through the ups and the downs as well as times of blessing and the times of testing. That is a gift older stewards provide. Not only that, but older believers know from experience God’s faithfulness toward us. They have been tested, and God has been faithful every single time. They know His track record from experience. They are able to provide wise counsel and comfort at difficult times. They are able to “disciple” other believers from what they have learned and from where they have come. Discipleship is the Gospel’s model for maturing in the faith. How could one imagine that older stewards do not play a critical role in that ministry?

Clearly, bringing together two or more generations of leaders takes prayer and wisdom. The cultural forces that shaped them are very different. Consider just a few of the trends and movements that are occurring:

1. From Serving in the Church ... to Serving in the Community. Baby boomers and older generations value the local church. When I was growing up, the focus was on building up the local church by making disciples for Jesus who then served faithfully in the church. The younger generation values the local church, but they place a high value on serving the community in the homeless shelters, food banks and prisons. In serving in these places, it does not matter whether the church gets the credit because service in the name of Jesus is what counts. Baby boomers were raised in a church-centered culture, where all good things happened in the life of the church. Younger generations are raised more with a “Kingdom of God” focus. The kingdom is expressed in the church but it is also expressed beyond the walls of the church in the marketplace, coffee shops and schools.
2. From an Evangelism Focus ... to a Social Justice Focus. Baby boomers focus on Evangelism—seeking and saving the lost. Without faith in Christ, people are eternally

lost. Nothing is more important than that to a baby boomer raised in the church. The younger generations agree that not knowing Jesus is a tremendous burden. But their focus is on the poor, the broken and the outcast. They struggle with too much focus on “stuff” while the poor are forgotten. They resonate with Peter when he said to Paul, “... remember the poor.” (Galatians 2:10)

3. From a Church Program Focus ... to a People/Relationship Focus. Baby boomers love to build bigger and better churches and with it, strong church programs. Good sermons, powerful and moving worship and strong children’s ministry are the center of their planning and focus. Millennials like strong churches as well but are more interested in relationships and lives being transformed. Seeking this transformation, they love friendships with older leaders who are willing to mentor, nurture and coach.

There are many other trends appearing across the horizon of the local church. If the older steward is to be a model of what God wants the younger generation to become, then it is important that open dialogue and prayer is created so that a healthy balance can be established between these shifting trends. That very conversation and mutual prayer can and will be used by the Spirit to yield a sweet and life-giving fruit, creating a very hopeful future for the church.



So, where does one begin to bring people together and create that conversation? Find a Gordon.

My home church did not have a formal program that sought to integrate the generations, but it happened because there were individuals like Gordon who reached out to younger people and came by their side in certain key areas and needs so that others could be nourished by the fruit of their lives.

What are those areas and needs for today? There are many answers to that question, but studies show that four key areas are as important to the baby boomers as they are to the millennials. The synergy of that connection is a good place for the local church to focus.

The four areas are: Faith Formation, Friendship, Fortitude in Service, and Financial Stability.

Faith Formation

This involves more than passing on information as to what the “real presence” means or what are the “two natures of Christ.” These are vitally important. In today’s world, however, the younger generation is hungry as well to learn how to pray. They are seeking ways to learn how to read the Bible. They are looking for a coach or a mentor who can come by their side and model for them what it means to walk the walk with Christ. They want to see Jesus with flesh on Him.

This is what happened in Kathy’s and Ellen’s relationship. Ellen is an eighth grader in our Lutheran School. Kathy, sixty-two years old, is her mentor. For many weeks they met, they talked, they prayed, they studied. Along the way a connection was made. Ellen, who has no memory of growing up in church, then asked Kathy to be her godparent. Ellen was baptized on the closing day of school in our chapel service. The only person standing with her at the baptismal font was Kathy. Ellen had come to taste the sweetness and joy of the fruit of Kathy’s life and faith.

Faith formation can be as simple as that or it can be more encompassing through teaching the many spiritual disciplines of the faith, such as worship, prayer, solitude, fasting, service, study, and meditation.

Older believers are ideal candidates to be involved in mentoring for many reasons. As we age, our hunger for spiritual matters deepens. A ministry such as mentoring is welcomed both by young believers and older ones because people who are raising children and pursuing careers have little time to learn. In retirement, there is more time and desire to be a part of this journey. The local church that offers specific training in this area will speak to a need of a group of people who are retiring and finding negotiable time on their hands.

Friendship

Studies reveal that people of all generations are hungry for meaningful and lasting friendships. Younger generations are especially drawn to older believers who take an interest in them and who model the joy and fullness that Jesus offers. “I have come that you might have life and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) The full life, that abundant life can be so elusive. This, however, is the gift that so many older stewards give witness to in their lives. I believe this is the draw that Joseph has with so many. Joseph is eighty years old. He is that guy who makes the coffee, opens the doors, and greets the people who enter the building. There is an infectious joy about him. One of the many things he has done over the years is to greet the children as they arrive for school. He opens the door for each one and says good morning with a smile. Recently he was hurt in an accident and had to stay home. When he returned weeks later, you would have thought a celebrity was in the building. Children hugged him and brought cookies and gifts. Joe was back! He has extended the hand of friendship across the generations and has changed the culture of our community by modeling the full life Jesus offers to us all.

Fortitude in Service

While there are many differences between the generations, one of the things that unites the older and the younger generation is the desire to give themselves in service. A natural way to connect them and engage them in conversation is through service projects and mission trips. This is seen clearly in Eleanor. She is seventy-

five years old, a hairdresser by trade, a servant in heart. Knowing who she is in our community is no problem. She is that lady with the blue hair. The words used most often to describe her are that “she is a workhorse.” Another name might be “Caleb.” Tirelessly, she tends to the flowers and bushes around the church and school. When I say flowers, a close estimation would be a thousand, give or take. On rainy days and hot muggy days, Eleanor is seen pushing the wheelbarrow and is on her hands and knees. Young and old who assist her will say it is hard to keep up with her. Her fortitude in service is inspiring. How can one feel tired when one watches her? How can one sit back and not feel moved to serve? Her service is not restricted to the church. She has travelled to mission sites and Indian reservations to serve in the name of Christ. People do not forget her. The blue hair helps, but her heart for Christ is what pierces the soul.

Financial Stability

Older stewards are not necessarily wealthy. Some are, but many are not. For the most part, however, they know how to manage money and how to save it. Studies reveal that there will be a great transfer of wealth in the next decade to the tune of trillions of dollars. Have you ever wondered what you will leave behind? Have you given thought to how you can bless your family and Christ’s church for ongoing kingdom work? Many do not realize that ordinary assets can become extraordinary blessings. The estate that you have, no matter how large or how small, is a stewardship entrusted to you.

Don and Marie had no idea they would give up farmland after owning it for so many years. But that’s exactly what they did once they understood the benefits of a charitable trust and how to fund the trust from the sale of farmland. Don and Marie receive lifetime income and their children will receive the income for a term of years when God calls them home. Since this was a charitable trust, Don and Marie received an income-tax deduction and bypassed capital gains tax. Don and Marie are wise older stewards who are blessing those who follow them.

You can also leave a legacy of faith through a Christian preamble in your will or trust. This can be in your own handwriting and attached to your documents. It can be a great source of comfort in a time of sorrow as a testament of your faith in Jesus. You can include your favorite verses and encourage your loved ones one last time. I like to tell my girls that this gives me the opportunity to have the final word. This would be a first for me.

Faith Formation. Friendship. Fortitude in Service. Financial Stability. As older stewards seek to have impact on the lives of others, the local church would do well for all generations to provide avenues that speak to these areas. It doesn’t need to be anything elaborate. One by one, the Gordons, Kathys, Josephs, Eleanors, Don and Maries, can by the power of the Spirit transform a community and a culture, one person at a time.

Here is one last story about Gordon. Years later after his invitation to lead the VBS closing, I went to Concordia, Bronxville. When I graduated, he was there. He was there at my graduation from the senior college in Fort Wayne as well as my graduation from the seminary and my installation at my first congregation where I serve presently. His devotion to me has had a lasting impact on my ministry. It has shaped the visits I make and the trips I take to “be there” in a key moment in someone’s life. Gordon, an older steward whose fruit continues to be sweet to the taste.

Years ago I remember hearing Dr. Charlie Mueller, Sr., addressing a conference. He wrapped up his talk by saying, “Do Something! Do Something New! Do Something Now!”

What can you do? What can you do that is new? What can and will you do now?

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Engaging Old-er Stewards in Investing for the Church's Future

As an 85-year-old descendant of five generations of Lutheran immigrants who since 1838 have successively invested in both the future of who knows how many congregations as well as in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod from its earliest days, I was raised to be future-oriented.

While most of my ancestors were laity, there were a number who became Lutheran pastors and school teachers. There was even a healthy sprinkling of them that served the LCMS as regional and national leaders. Future oriented? Of course.

My goal in developing this wedge of the current *Issues in Christian Education* topic is to encourage old-er (I find it helpful to spell it that way) Lutherans to first of all invest in the future of their congregation and then do the same for the Synod. I fully understand that our national body has needs that deserve the prayers and the generous support of its member congregations and of all who affiliate with each parish. In my experience, the best way to care for the Synod is by encouraging members to invest in their congregations.

One reason I believe that's true is that the vast number of old-er Lutherans within our Synod do not have nearly enough synodical

service positions for them to be personally involved. That's not so in local churches. Most congregations offer many opportunities for engaging in the mission in their communities. Former House of Representatives Speaker Tip O'Neill vigorously argued that all politics is local. I believe that on the basis of biblical examples and church history that the future of the national and international church is determined locally as well. Our calling then as living and breathing old-er Lutherans is to invest ourselves in the future of the local and the national church in whichever ways best promote parish-based worship, education, service, fellowship, stewarding and the honing of witnessing skills. With all that in mind, a key question needs to be asked and answered concerning one's local parish.

Does My Local Church Have a Future in Which I Can Invest?

All Lutheran congregations have more than one future at their founding. They have three. Sadly, many exert little effort toward claiming the last two of their three futures. Instead, they snuggle down with their highly predictable probable future and let it go at that. That decision is why so many churches soon after birth begin a slow and steady decline until in time they have no future remaining to speak of. Literally. The way to escape the clutches of a probable future is by actively seeking and identifying some possible futures (note the plural), the sooner the better.

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Seeking is always finding. Having identified a number of possible futures, the parish must choose from among them, turn their choice or choices into the congregation's preferable future and wholeheartedly invest in it. That's how today's healthiest congregations got to be that way.

Dynamic congregations of all sizes (and they do come in all sizes) do not get that way by chance. They get that way by their members making choices. This is particularly true of when Spirit-led old-er members individually and collectively invest in a vibrant tomorrow for their congregation.

One difficulty many Lutheran churches have in escaping that dreaded probable future is that they were not so much a church as an ethnic or family enclave that from its beginning resisted both internal change as well as giving attention to any in their broader community who were not like them. They assumed that their future was tied to a hearty parish birthrate while attracting immigrants or migrants who were like them. But there were a number of flies in that ointment. The composition of their membership aged. The parish birthrate declined. Migrants stopped migrating in their direction. Their probable future took root and then took over. Too bad.

But not all was lost. Some mission minded members for family reasons did not leave. But in doing so their eyes were always on the lookout for future-minded ministries or service outlets outside their parish boundaries in which they could and then often did invest. Reflecting on the survival mode in which their home church seemed locked, they shared John Greenleaf Whittier's poignant observation, "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been.'"

What kept that sad observation at bay for other churches was that they had old-er members who understood the importance of investing in a changing future as essential to survival and pushed for positive changes. Blessed with a positive, can-do spirit, these members did not view change as the enemy. They concurred with ancient Romans, who 500 years before Christ, had a Latin saying which translated said, "The times are changing, and we are changing in



them." That tenet breaks down into two classic Lutheran teachings:

- 1 The times in which we live are constantly changing;
- 2 We who live in them are constantly changing, too.

Subscribing to both teachings helps old-er Lutherans to appreciate that investing in a congregation's preferable future is the way to go even though it will invariably include dealing with change. They know that change is more than important. It's the entrée to progress and their preferable future.

But that's not all. There is some amazing big picture stuff. When a local church and its members identify and invest in their preferable future, a bottom-up action is triggered that blesses the entire church. Significant change in the church seldom filters down from above. It works its way up the national ladder bearing gifts up to the Synod from individuals and local churches who earlier had invested in their local church's preferable future. From there those gifts get spread to all who are ready to press on in life. This bottom-up process is the ecclesiastical equivalent of William Wallace's view of how political and social change, good or bad, happens. "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world."

In support of this perception, are there any of our church body's regional family service agencies or facilities serving the needs of seniors that were not started by a local church or local group of churches? Track where Wheat Ridge

Ministries, Bethesda Lutheran Communities, Millneck Manor, Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch, the Lutheran Hour, the LWML, the LLL, the Walther League and so many other ministries got their start. While over time some of these home grown efforts found a place under the synodical umbrella, it was John and Mary Lutheran, plus personal friends, who got them going by investing in a preferable future for their own parish. That kind of thing is still going on today through budding ministries like Comfort Dogs and Laborers for Christ. Wherever we have cause for rejoicing in programs or practices within our national church, it can usually be traced to visionary old-er church members who identified and invested in a local church's preferable future.

Those Who Are Old-er Need to Keep Investing in the Church's Future

Getting old-er is not the same as being old. Getting old-er is a process that begins at birth. Being old is something very different. AARP in a survey of eight hundred people between the ages of forty and ninety asked, "How old is old?" The February/March 2014 issue of the AARP magazine reported that both sexes agreed men were old at seventy years of age. When the focus shifted to women, the sexes disagreed. Men said women were old at sixty-eight years of age. Women said that being old didn't happen to them until age seventy-five.

Whatever old meant to those who were surveyed, Audrey and I at 85 years of age do not agree with their answers. Are we getting

old-er? Oh, my yes. Do we daily deal with a rising number of aches, pains and physical ailments? Tell me. But old? Henry Wadsworth Longfellow speaks for us. When asked to compose a poem honoring the 50th anniversary of his class's graduation from Bowdoin College, he crafted a lengthy response that dismissed old as a seriously limiting life-issue and concluded his poem in this way:

"For age is opportunity no less
Than youth itself, though in
another dress,
And as the evening twilight fades away
The sky is filled with stars,
invisible by day."

In high style he wiped out all wobbly notions about old by using three re-defining words, "...age is opportunity..."

Were Longfellow alive today, I think he'd add a few verses about a huge change with which today's old-er men and women are dealing. In summary, people are living longer. While this is happening, things are getting crowded at life's table. There are now six distinct, separate, sequential and named chunks of life, each about twenty years in length that we call generations, jockeying for a more prominent position in our world. That's what political struggles and social unrest are all about. All of us are caught up in the tsunami of this generational thing. Check it out.

At birth everyone is permanently situated in one of those generational cells. For example, my permanent generational abode is the Silent Generation. It is composed of everyone born between 1925 and 1944. As with every generation, we have grown up heavily influenced by what happened to us and around us during the double decade in which our generation was formed.

The generation that came on the scene in the twenty years before mine is the GI Generation, the one Tom Brokaw made famous. Following my generation, three more formed and are still on the scene. In order of their appearance they are the Boomers, the Gen-X and the Millennials, each unique. A yet unnamed and incomplete sixth generation is currently taking shape until its full capacity is reached in 2025 A.D.

For Audrey and me, our interest in generations stems from more than a sociological curiosity. When we invest in the future of our local and national church, we do so knowing that what we do will have a direct effect on:

- our four Boomer Generation children;
- our seventeen grandchildren spread over the Gen-X and Millennial Generations;
- our three (soon to be eight) great grandchildren, all of whom are on board of the sixth and unnamed generation.

We invest as best we can in the preferable future of both the local and national church, knowing that our own developing and changing family ranges across those very different generations. We care about your family, too, because the biblical message is clear, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” We show our love by investing in the future of the church with three specific assets the Father has given us to manage. Those three assets are popularly known as *time*, *talents* and *treasure*. We manage them as His stewards.

Steward is little more than a vague and occasional contemporary word, but it is a strong and very clear biblical term. Biblical stewards managed properties that were owned by another. Biblical stewards knew they could be subject to audit and sometime abrupt dismissal because stewards were not owners. Today, a steward would be called a manager, or maybe a trustee, or perhaps an agent. Faith-filled 21st century church members see themselves as God’s stewards. They understand that they manage what is better understood as His time, His talents and His treasures. As real stewards, they know that they are more than observers lollygagging around in the life’s grandstands, waiting for something interesting to happen. They know that they are meant to be down on the playing field, doing their thing where the action is.

Faithful 21st century stewards spurn sorry excuses about having “been there and done that.” Their head is on a perpetual swivel looking for new ways to invest from their 3-Ts in support of a preferable future of their home church and the church-at-large. There are many different ways to do that. No one way is of greater value than any other. The only criterion

of worth is how faithfully His stewards invest that for which they are accountable. Do His stewards make investing mistakes? Only one: failing to invest.

Old-er Stewards Actively Invest from His 3-Ts in Their Church’s Future

It’s not as if we did not have abundant examples of ancestors who were faithful 3-T stewards. It’s because yesteryear’s old-er stewards invested in their preferred future that we have the many resources with which we work today, including many of our historic congregations, small and large, the LCMS history mission at home and abroad, colleges, seminaries and many other powerful ministries in which our ancestors invested. In remembering magnificent accomplishments of the past, we dare not minimize the size of many enabling gifts that were given. Every dollar invested by a poor pensioner is on a par with a building fully endowed by a millionaire. It’s a matter of how the 3-Ts God placed into the hands of His stewards were invested.

Rather than generalize on ways various stewards in our Lutheran past used their 3-Ts, let me suggest a few specifics to encourage and guide God’s stewards today.

When the sainted Dr. John W. Behnken, longtime president of the LCMS, retired, one of the things which he did until his death was to discuss what to include in one’s will. He suggested that all of us should treat some kind of Christian ministry as if it were one of our children. In sharing that suggestion, he used

all of the 3-Ts with which God had entrusted him by helping to lay the foundation for the Lutheran Church Extension Fund, a powerful future-oriented ministry of the LCMS.

More recently, retired four-star General John Vessey was asked to use his skills to gather and lead a cadre of old-er Lutherans, largely laity, in “For the Sake of the Church,” an effort to raise \$400,000,000 in support of LCMS colleges and seminaries while also doubling their student enrollment. Doing this provided creating opportunities for thousands to invest their 3-Ts in this astounding project that quietly continues producing results even though it is seldom mentioned.

Urging stewards to invest money in the future of the church is important, but it is by no means the whole of our calling. There is significance and value in regularly offering fervent personal and intercessory prayers on behalf of many people and causes. When the sainted and much old-er Dr. Paul Streufert was

no longer able to preach, he greeted his pastor each Sunday by saying that he had on that very morning prayed for the preacher and for his message, asking that both be blessed. And then he would take his seat in church, confident that his prayer would be answered. How that lifted a preacher’s heart! Thank God, many of our old-er members invest in the future of the church through daily prayer. They know that prayer changes things, not the least of whom is the one who invests in the future of their local and national church with prayer. All generations on their way through life, our own descendants certainly included, are blessed in this way. St. Augustine credits his mother’s prayers with bringing him to faith later in life. In these treacherous times, the needs of our children, our grandchildren and great grandchildren cry out, moving us to invest in intercessory prayer on their behalf and on that of the church.

Pastor Tim Fangmeyer invests in the church’s future by facilitating a ministry to prison inmates known as KAIROS. He regularly invites others to share in this ministry through their prayers. Prayer partners from across the nation are invited to invest in half-hour time slots which they have selected around the clock on the specific days that the KAIROS group is in the prison doing God’s work. What a communion of prayer-saints those who invest in prayer become!

Prayer is a powerful investment in the church’s future, but it is not the whole of it. A medieval monastic order operated under the Latin motto *Ora et Labor* which translated means “Pray and Work.” Today, there is a veritable army of old-er laity, teachers, pastors and church workers who pray but who also serve as volunteer laborers where they are needed. Retired Lutheran Day School teachers Terry and Naomi are two of them. Making a transition, they sold their home, bought a travel-trailer and began crisscrossing the nation looking for places to invest their 3-Ts time by helping to build or rebuild churches, schools or places that were struck by disaster. They’ve been doing this for more than a decade.

Old-er Bob and Wayne (and how many others?) invest in the church’s future as volunteer construction “missionaries” with



organizations like Laborers for Christ, Habitat for Humanity, and other hands-on programs like Camp Relief. In citing those examples, we dare not forget all who invest in their local church's future by assisting people in their church and community who need help with home repairs and maintenance.

You are not a nail-pounder, garden planter or a snow shoveler? Then, join old-er Lutherans who teach English as a Second Language, here and abroad. Or coach those preparing for high school equivalency exams. Dan, Dottie and Diane, with other old-er parochial and public school teachers, staff a free after-school tutoring program in their church's facility. Retired church worker Ken has taken another tack. He promotes mentoring (a one-to-one ministry of encouraging children) by getting that program started wherever he can. Participation not only blesses children, but it gives those who are old-er an investment opportunity that is ideal for this stage of life.

Donna and many others write letters, send greeting cards and make phone calls as a part of their parish's future-oriented ministry to the home bound. Other old-er church members invest in the church's future by packing and mailing much-appreciated care-packages to service men and women, to college students, and to any facing long-term medical treatment. Through their investments, the church's Gospel light shines deeper and deeper into the future.

Have you considered investing in the church's futures by becoming involved with residents of a nursing home? As long as she lived, old-er Anna invested in her church's off-site future by wheeling her chair up and down the halls of the nursing home where she resided and visiting with those who were alone. Ninety-nine year old-er Aurelia invested in her church's futures ministry by opening herself to minimum wage staffers who needed someone with whom to talk about their families and what was happening in their lives.

Old-er Gary carried his sound equipment to care centers where he entertained residents celebrating birthdays. The birthday parties are planned and catered by an auxiliary largely composed of old-er men and women who take

a special interest in the residents, especially those who no longer have a family or are far from former homes.

Others invest in the future of the church by using their 3-Ts to prepare and deliver Meals on Wheels, by staffing soup kitchens and food pantries, by making quilts for the needy, by maintaining telephone-trees that keep individuals from falling into the cracks, by training and serving as Stephen Ministers, and on and on. None of them is idly saying, "There is nothing I can do." They invest their 3-Ts in their parish's preferred future and as such provide a future not only for their home parish but for the church-at-large.

What shall we say about those hundreds of trained and retired old-er church workers who after a lifetime in His vineyard still invest in the future by filling otherwise vacant church ministries? Many laughingly describe themselves as church workers who are "good-for-nothings." Good they are. Nothing is what many both expect and receive for their significant services. God blesses them, and through them, He blesses many.

But what if you thought you are past your prime and that investing in the future is an opportunity no longer open to you? Let me assure you that God will not only bless your investment in the future of the church, but He also opens doors for those who are Spirit-led to enter.

The sainted old-er Pastor William Bruening advised God's willing stewards, "Never say "No" to a ministry opportunity when you can say "Yes." That advice has scared a lot of Lutherans over the years. They think that it means that you can never say "No" to a request for your service. Not at all. It means that God guides old-er Lutheran church members to the local and national church's preferable future, there awaiting one of His steward's 3-T investments.

If a limiting life circumstance prevents you to say "Yes," don't worry about it. Ours is a God of the second chance. But, steward of the Lord, if it's the right moment for you to make an investment in the future through your local or national church, this is the time to do something, to do something new, to do something new now!

book reviews

A Vision for the Aging Church.

James M. Houston and

Michael Parker.

Downers Grove, Illinois:

InterVarsity Press, 2011.

I'm sure you've heard the saying, "Don't judge a book by its cover." The contents of the book just might outshine the drab appearance presented to the reader. The book, *A Vision for the Aging Church*, by Houston and Parker (2011) is that book! At first glance, it is not a book that looks intriguing or one that I would take a second look at; yet, agreeing to write a review forces me to go beyond the front cover. It was the beginning of gaining a deeper insight into the challenges many congregations face. Are the seniors of the congregation a vibrant part of ministry or are they simply overlooked because they are "old"?

Aging is a very natural process and one that cannot be stopped. We age every day, but as a society aging has a negative connotation—so much so that people will do "whatever" to stop the aging process. Of course the efforts are futile and a great deal of energy is expended in stopping an unstoppable process. The negative mentality of aging transfers over into how people "see" seniors as well as how they treat seniors. It is from this mentality Houston and Parker show the reader where society has gone wrong.

The senior is more than just a person with medical problems, disease, or inability to "keep up" with the world. The senior is a wealth of knowledge and a great resource for the church. The senior "focused on work for

the Lord is generally a happy, fulfilled and successful ager" (p. 225). However, in order to gain access to the wealth one must have an understanding of the precious resource that is before them. Houston and Parker approach the subject with a unique perspective. The subject is approached from a scientific as well as a scriptural perspective.

Science offers great insight to the aging body, the challenges seniors face, and the myths surrounding the concept of aging. On the other hand, scripture offers a living guide for all humanity with an emphasis on how to take care of the elderly. Scripture did not say to "set them aside"; scripture notes to embrace and gain wisdom from the elderly. The view of science and scripture is intertwined throughout the entirety of the book, which helps the reader gain an understanding of the precious resource sitting within their congregations.

Houston and Parker do not simply give the scientific and scriptural insights into the lives of seniors. They offer great solutions in how the congregation can go from overlooking seniors to making seniors a vibrant part of ministry. To help the congregation make a step in the right direction there is a list of questions provided to open up the dialogue amongst church leadership. It is from that dialogue a shift can occur in how people see and treat seniors.

As we help our elderly become teachers again and as they are brought more into contact with younger generations, the Boomer generation and younger cohorts will learn how to confront their own aging in a proactive manner. As our elders are properly mentored and loved, they in turn, can cultivate the kind of friendships and family relations that counter our narcissistic culture (p. 225-226).

Remember the saying—"Don't judge a book by its cover"? Sitting on my table is a rather drab looking book but a great resource into understanding the crucial topic of aging in our congregations. Sitting in the pews of our churches are people that may have a wrinkle or two but are a precious resource full of wisdom and knowledge. Action is required to gain insight into the topic and to tap into that wisdom and knowledge. Take action!

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**Families and Faith:
How Religion is Passed Down
Across Generations.
Bengtson, Vern L. New York:
Oxford University Press, 2013.**

Given the enormous changes in American society since the 1960s, especially in media, morals, and declining church attendance, one would assume that parents no longer have the same religious influence on their children they once had. But Vern L. Bengtson surprises us. Bengtson is AARP/University Professor of Gerontology and Sociology Emeritus and Research Professor of Social Work at the University of Southern California. For thirty-five years, he and his colleagues conducted the largest-ever study of religion and family across generations, following more than 350 families composed of more than 3,500 individuals whose lives span more than a century. Bengtson concludes in *Families and Faith* that despite enormous generational changes, parents have always played and still play the most influential role in their children's adult faith.

Part One of *Families and Faith* recaps the religious changes that have transpired over seven generations from the WWI Generation (born 1890–1915) to the Millennials (born 1980–88). Readers will enjoy comparing each generation's divergent perceptions of God and spirituality, promoting understanding and goodwill. Part Three proffers numerous factors from thirty-five years of research on the likelihood an adult child will stay, leave, or return to the parents' faith. For example, high-boundary religious groups like Evangelical Christians have the highest rates of religious transmission. Zealots (adult children who are highly religious compared to their parents and often convert to a different faith) often produce Rebels (children who find a different religion from their parents

or drop out of religion altogether). And as one would guess, unaffiliated parents are likely to produce unaffiliated children.

Part Two is the heart of *Families and Faith*, empirically confirming that the most important factor in the transmission of faith is parental warmth. Cold, distant, or authoritarian parenting is unlikely to transmit faith by governing with guilt: "You need to be going to church, we raised you this way, you're not fulfilling your obligations and duties" (85). Ambivalent parenting (when either parent is perceived as sometimes warm and sometimes cold, or when one parent is perceived as warm and the other parent as cold) creates religious ambiguity. And it goes without saying that preoccupied parenting distracted by marital, financial, or substance abuse problems does not successfully transmit faith. Warm, affirming parenting does. Bengtson warmed my heart with the example of Ken and Elaine:

If our kids have a question about something, we go ahead and answer it as best we can. Maybe it starts like, "What should I do in this situation?" As parents you have to be willing and able to catch those times, because later kids will just clam up; they don't want to talk. I always made a point of trying to go up to bed with them, read, pray, sing them a song. And then it's kind of a time to, you know, ask, "Do you want to talk about anything?" That's the time of openness (83).

Thirty-five years of research confirms that faith is most likely to be transmitted when a child feels close to warm, affirming parents like Ken and Elaine, whose adult children

and grandchildren have assimilated the same beliefs and practices.

The research also reveals that warm, affirming grandparenting can also play a stabilizing role in faith transmission. Shari practices her Catholic faith today because of her grandfather Leo, her "Rock":

It meant we were going to be in the same place together. I mean, you go to mass. And, you know, my grandfather had a carnation in his lapel. We sat in the same seats. It was really predictable. And most of what was going on in my family life just wasn't really that predictable, except when I was with the whole family. It was predictable. And we liked that (105).

Especially when parents are preoccupied and precarious, grandparents like Leo can be a stabilizing influence on their grandchildren's faith.

After researching faith transmission for thirty-five years, Bengtson pinpoints two factors that will most increase the likelihood a child will carry on the faith of warm, affirming parents: (1) consistency in church worship; (2) consistency in family devotions. As a pastor, *Faith and Families* has caused our church to redouble our efforts in teaching and supplying resources for family devotions. Quoting from *Faith and Families* in sermons empirically substantiates our parents' need to "train up their children in the way they should go." Above all, *Faith and Families* spurs our church's need to equip our members to be warm, affirming parents through a relationship in, with, and under their warm, affirming God.

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book reviews

Joyfully Aging: A Christian's Guide.

Richard Bimler.

**St. Louis: Concordia Publishing
House, 2012.**

Some of my best friends are aging! You can't live without it! To live is to age!

Today eight out of ten Americans over age sixty-five are in fairly good health and are aging well. It is hard to believe, but folks over the age of eighty represent the fastest growing segment of society. At this moment in time, 10,000 Baby Boomers are turning sixty-five every day and will be spending one-third of their life in retirement. By 2030, some experts believe that there will be seventy-two million older adults living in America. That's one in five people. We are experiencing "mass" aging, not "mere" aging. We are in the midst of a longevity revolution—a dynamic paradigm shift from a youth-dominating society to an elder society.

In our congregations, one-half of the worshippers are reaching retirement age. The median age of Lutheran worshippers is fifty-four. There are six times more worshippers over the age of sixty-five than those between the age of fifteen and twenty-five. In membership, there are as many over the age of fifty as under age fifty.

I believe the church has the call to answer three questions. "How do we help an aging population deal with these extra years of living?" "How do we help the entire congregation recognize aging as a gift from God?" "How do we help our seniors see themselves as stewards of God's gifts?"

In his book, *Joyfully Aging*, Richard Bimler seeks to answer these questions. His thoughts are the observations of an Ambassador of Health, Hope, and Healing. He develops a Christian guide for the aging pilgrim. His book is not an answer book, but a book about the promises we have in Jesus Christ. His message is insightful, frequently humorous, but always Gospel-centered. His theme is to age joyfully. He wants the reader to recognize aging as a spiritual journey as one of God's

pilgrims. A pilgrim is an individual who has a shrine in his heart dedicated to Jesus Christ in service through one's hands that reach out in loving, caring and forgiving ways, with one's destiny and goal being heaven.

One way to review his book is to develop, in acrostic form, his message. This is a style that the author frequently uses, and here are some examples.

Jesus Christ is to be the very center of our lives as we age.

Open up our lives to the possibilities and opportunities to share our faith wherever God puts us in families, congregations, and communities.

Yeah for grandparents—let them tell their stories.

Face up to the issues of an aging population—health and housing, finances and fears, ethical decisions and eternal life.

Utilize God's story of love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ as we tell our story of God's love in our lives.

Life is a roller coaster ride of Good Fridays and Easters.

Laughter and aging go together like a horse and a carriage (only older adults understand this imagery). The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy (Psalm 126:3).

Yes, we see aging as a gift from God. We remember who we are and whose we are because of our Baptism.

An aging attitude affirms life at every age.

Guess what? There is no such thing as retiring on this side of heaven.

Initiate a plan to share the hope we have in the aging process because of Jesus Christ. We are stewards of His mysteries.

Never forget—the Lord loves older people more and more. How can you tell? Because he is making more and more of us every day.

Go to the cemetery and observe the dashes between the dates on the tombstones. Ponder what that means in terms of our life here on earth. What will our dash reveal?

As you read this book, I invite you to answer three questions. "What is God saying to me as I age?" "What does it mean for me to live out these extra years?" "How do I go about aging joyfully?"

Thanks to Rich Bimler for these reliable and practical ideas to guide the aging pilgrim. Pastors, teachers and lay leaders of congregations will benefit in reading this insightful book as they develop a ministry to, by, with, and for older adults. The fifty-plus crowd will find much food for thought to enhance and enrich their spiritual journey. Might I suggest that pastors give *Joyfully Aging* as a gift to members when they retire from their daily occupation? *Joyfully Aging* would be an excellent resource for Bible classes, seminars, and retreats. This book is about aging as a blessing. It is about affirming life as a gift from God, despite our worries, woes, and wrinkles. It is about living an abundant life in the Lord. Whoever reads this book will learn much about living life to its fullest.

My only quibble with the author is that his book is too short. Hopefully, in the near future, he will write another book that will assist God's people to age gracefully, gratefully, and graciously to the glory of God.

Here is a prayer attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr that serves well the aging pilgrim: "O God, grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, courage to change things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Amen."

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**Senior Adult Ministry
Manual: A Ministry to and
by Senior Adults.
Kenneth Holdorf. Self-published:
Carrollton, Texas, 2014.**

Readers older than seventy years will probably remember when they were in high school, looking at the size of the classes that followed them. It seemed that the number of students of each successive class doubled and tripled in number. Those same readers will probably remember the scurry on the part of communities and districts to build new schools, additional classrooms, or remodel existing buildings to accommodate those students who would become known as the “Boomers.”

Those young people who caused the flurry of activity in the ‘60s and ‘70s are now turning 65, at the rate of 10,000 per day. Presently, 13 percent of the population is over 65. By 2030 that rate will be over 20 percent. These statistics tell us that the Christian church faces a tremendous challenge and opportunity.

The Senior Adult Ministry Manual: A Ministry to and by Senior Adults was designed as a resource to enhance senior adult ministry in the local congregations of our church. The author builds a case for congregations to take a serious look at senior ministry. He

provides a step-by-step plan to start a senior adult ministry and offers valuable ideas for congregations to strengthen a program that might already be in practice.

This manual is unique in that the author approaches the topic from the biblical perspective. The Scriptures tell us that God uses “old” people for His purposes (Genesis 7:6, 17:17, 25:8, Exodus 7:7, Luke 2:36-37); He gives them wisdom (Job 12:12); He gives spiritual birth and insight to them (Hebrews 5:12b-14); He demands that they be loved, honored, and respected (Proverbs 1:8, 1 Timothy 5:1-2, 1 Peter 5:5). On this basis, the reader is led to understand that God includes all ages in His plan and purpose, and that the Church is being given a responsibility and privilege to reach out to those who make up what has become known as the “Age Wave.”

Rev. Holdorf has created a very practical and effective resource for congregations. He provides instruments for the reader to recognize the need for senior adult ministry, to identify that portion of his/her congregational membership that make up this age group, to garner support from

congregational leaders, both called and laity, and to develop a mission statement and strategic plan.

He includes forty-nine practical ideas and suggestions to assist congregations in celebrating ministry to and by senior adults. His suggestions fall under the following categories: Special Events; Fellowship Events; Educational Events; Celebrating Seniors in Worship; Seniors Sharing Their Life Stories; Intergenerational Events and Activities; Special Training Events; Helping Hands Events.

As the author states, “The challenge present in the Christian church today is to have a broader vision, develop a belief that seniors are special children of God with significance and value, and clarify the mission of the church that includes senior adults which leads to intentional strategic plans for a ministry to and by senior adults.”

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book reviews

**Joy Boosters—120 Ways to
Encourage Older Adults.
Missy Buchanan.
Nashville, Tennessee:
Upper Room Books, 2012.**

Here is a small, easy-to-read booklet designed to encourage and cheer the senior adults in your home or congregation. It is really more of a pocket guide, with 120 suggestions to bring joy to any senior adult, whether at their own home, in an assisted living facility or in a nursing home. All of these joy boosters may be adapted by both church and family to meet the needs of older adults.

There are twelve categories of boosters:

- Connecting through questions and conversations
- Keep the faith
- Moving to a new home
- Encouraging from a distance
- Using photographs
- Mini-getaways
- Music for older ears
- Hobbies and interests
- Finding laughter
- Holidays and special occasions
- Bridging the generation gap
- Building a legacy

Missy Buchanan has put together a wonderful listing of ideas and activities for older adults. How about VBS for older adults? How about videotaping their home of many years before moving to an assisted living residence? How about putting together a CD of songs from their childhood or early years? Of course, celebrating birthdays. Journaling with a purpose and bringing a family reunion to them are other suggestions.

These are just a few of the 120 ways to encourage older adults in your family or congregation. Well written, this booklet can be used every week in families and congregations.

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