What if we reinvented “Senior Adult Ministry” and changed the church?

Trends tell us that Boomer Generation folks aren’t interested in traditional Older Adult Ministries. A huge number of Boomers are what we would call “unchurched,” but may actually be very interested in spiritual matters in general. Rather than wait for churches to minister to us, what if we mentor our successors to spread the Gospel and make a difference in our communities? How we do that will be our legacy. If we do it well, wouldn’t that change the church and the world?

January 2017

Martha Stokes
Director of Church and Community Relations

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What if We Boomers…

What images of aging do you remember seeing when you were young?

Between 1946 – 1964, 76 million babies were born.
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

• The Hippie Vanguard: 1946 – 1950
• Watergate Kids: 1951 – 1955
• Dazed and Confused: 1956 – 1960
• The Last Boomers: 1961 - 1964

NO MATTER WHAT WE CALL OURSELVES, AS WE AGE, WE...

▪ Become less and less alike.
▪ Tend to view ourselves as 10-15 years younger than our actual age
▪ Experience more chronic illnesses and disabilities
IN 1950, MAINLINE CHURCHES BEGAN TO GROW...

WE COULD AGAIN...
BUT ONLY IF WE ARE INTENTIONAL

What if We Boomers...
NOT A SOCIAL SECURITY CHECK BUT A REALITY CHECK

4 Reasons Nobody Wants to Go to Church Any More

• “I feel judged.”
• “I don’t want to be lectured.”
• “Church people are a bunch of hypocrites.”
• “Your God is irrelevant to my life. But I’d like to know there is a God and he cares about me.”

If a church has an intentional outreach ministry, it is usually focused on younger generations.
If the church really wants to reach millennials, it will be more successful if it reaches the Boomer parents first.

And don’t forget our grandchildren….

Most Boomers do not appreciate current approaches to senior adult ministries.
We weren’t taught to be disciples in our youth so many of us are searching for a safe place to help us move toward spiritual maturity.

Boomers are searching for significance, so worship style is not the first thing that will attract us.
"I have arrived at this age and stage of my life seeking a spiritual life, a simple life. But there's an irony here as well. Rather than singing with angels, I often find myself wrestling with them."
- Carol Orsborn

We want spiritual formation opportunities that are relevant, authentic, and significant.

Keep in mind that Boomers are the greatest consumers of technology.
Many Boomers see a IMPACT deficit in the church.

This is extremely important when we realize how essential Boomers are to the overall financial health of the church.

For the most part, we don’t want to talk about traditional types of retirement.
A second coming of age facing issues of identity, independence and intimacy.

“I am convinced that there are many of God's best seasoned leaders who don't know what to do at the season we are in, and are bored with leadership titles and roles in hierarchies of organizations, board meetings, but who now have the most value to add to younger generations, if they will do it out of friendship, not a command-and-control type of leadership.”

More than ever, we need each other.
SO WHAT DO WE DO...

ACTION STEPS:

• Look at current adult faith formation programming and compare to community demographics
• Identify life issues and spiritual needs in the congregation and larger community

MISSION INSITE
Church Demographics Specialists

<table>
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<td>65+ Elderly</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>65+ above the state average</td>
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What if We Boomers…
ACTION STEPS:

• Design, implement, and market an innovative faith formation/disciple-making plan that at first might seem unconventional

Offer a variety of entry points based upon interest and options for participation

Provide spiritual growth opportunities in a variety of settings: home, church, community
Offer advocacy, service and mission options that really matter.

Create faith formation around milestones and life transitions.

Develop life long learning opportunities.
WHAT DID YOU GAIN THAT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR CHURCH TOMORROW?

Selected Resources


Baby Boomers and Beyond: Tapping the Ministry Talents and Passions of Adults over 50 by Amy Hanson (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010)


Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People are DONE with the Church but Not Their Faith by Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2015)


One Church, Four Generations Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church by Gary McIntosh (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002)


**Soulful Aging: Ministry through the Stages of Adulthood** by Henry C. Simmons and Jane Wilson. Smyth & Helwys, Macon, GA (2001)


**Webinars Offered by UMC Discipleship Ministries**

To register for upcoming or view archived webinars: [www.umcdiscipleship.org/webinars](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/webinars)

Baby Boomer Spirituality Webinars with Craig Kennet Miller: To go with the publication of his new book on **Boomer Spirituality: Seven Values for the Second Half of Life** (available for preorder at Amazon.com)

- *Who are the Boomers?*
  - **DATE:** Tuesday, January 24, 2017
  - **TIME:** 8 pm Eastern

- *The Spiritual Roots of Boomers*
  - **DATE:** Tuesday, January 31, 2017
  - **TIME:** 8 pm Eastern

- *Boomers and the Search for God*
  - **DATE:** Tuesday, February 7, 2017
  - **TIME:** 8 pm Eastern

**Discipleship Ministries Leadership Resources Staff:**

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Declining Membership

Activating boomers to save churches

A local church recently asked members to volunteer for a weekend trip to southwestern Virginia to build ramps for some wheelchair-bound folks. Eight adults went, ranging in age from 24 to 72 years old. The ringleader was a 56-year-old. A boomer at midlife.

The boomer recruited the other participants, focusing especially on getting some young adults to come along. (He figured some young muscle might reduce his intake of Advil over the course of the weekend.)

Upon their return from the mission, the first question all of them, including the young adult men who went, asked was: “When can we do something like this again?”

That question is music to the ears of anyone involved in running a church today. That’s because church membership and participation among the younger generations has fallen to the lowest levels ever, according to the National Opinion Research Center’s General Social Surveys, conducted annually since 1972.

Today only 18 percent of Millennials (those age 30 and under) attend church weekly. When Gen Xers were the same age, 21 percent attended church weekly. And 20 percent of boomers, when they were under 30, went to church weekly.

Knowing this, many churches are scrambling to figure out how to engage young adults in new ways, attracting them to come to church. One strategy few seem to have mastered is to more fully engage those boomers already in the pews. In fact, we think churches that find new ways to “activate” their boomer members will be successful at attracting and engaging younger members, too.

Boomers at ages 50, 60 and beyond have reached a stage of life where spiritual vitality is growing in importance. This quest should be bringing many boomers back to churches across the country. Yet that isn’t happening. According to the General Social Surveys, boomer attendance levels remain virtually unchanged over the past 20 years.

Could it be that churches themselves have not figured out how to make sure they are relevant to boomers who are seeking spiritual vitality? Probably.

We were recently asked to address church leaders on how to better engage boomers and came up with five ways, based on our research and understanding of today’s boomers:

1) Start by finding their passions, not their “skills.”

Too often churches, and other volunteer-dependent organizations, try to match skill sets with needs. What drives most boomers to volunteer isn’t a desire to exercise their skills, but a desire to fulfill a passion. Boomers want to make an emotional investment of their time and talents, not strictly a rational one. Organizations that identify individual passions and then match them with specific needs are more likely to have full rosters of volunteers — of all ages.

2) Engage them in short-term missions.

The success of Habitat for Humanity in getting thousands of homes built over the past 20 years is rooted in the “packaging” of their mission. Rather than trying to engage people to support their overall goal of creating housing for those who need a helping hand, they instead focus on a specific project for a specific family. This “go, do, done, results” model enables boomers to participate and then know they can return to that house years later to share their contribution with their grandkids.

The simplicity of the mission to build ramps in southwestern Virginia worked the same way for the local church.

3) Answer “what’s in it for me?”

A generational trait of many boomers is to view everything through the lens of “what’s in it for me?” In addition to promoting the “greater good” aspect of a volunteer opportunity for boomers, church leaders should provide the answer to that, too.

4) Unleash the leader within.

Boomers like to be in charge, exercising their strong desire to control everything. Volunteer opportunities that have a general framework but require leadership from participants in order for it to be successful will attract boomers. Recognize that and develop volunteer opportunities that leverage this leadership mentality.

5) Equip them to be cross-generational mentors.

In survey after survey, young adults today report that they genuinely like boomers. Thanks to the strong and close relationships between Millennials and their parents, many young adults today seek out mentors among boomer-age adults. Churches should foster and encourage cross-generational projects and missions. Especially if the participants come together around a shared passion. Age doesn’t matter, passion does.

By figuring out how to more fully engage boomers at this stage of life, churches will flourish for years to come. Given that churches are the ultimate “local business,” any transformation that takes place in the community and among boomer participants will get noticed by all.

Even young adults.

Matt Thomhill is president of the Boomer Project. Contact him at (804) 890-4837 or matt@boomerproject.com.
Five Implications for Churches as the Boomers Retire
By Thom Rainer, May 19, 2014

They are the children of the 60s. There was a time they said you couldn’t trust anyone over 30 . . . until they turned 30 themselves. Until the Millennials were born, they were the largest generation in America’s history with over 76 million live births.

They are the Baby Boomers, or the Boomers, as they are typically called today. On January 1, 2011, the first Boomer turned 65. In fact, on that day, 10,000 of them turned 65. And that pace of aging will continue until 2030, when every Boomer is 65 or older. The implications for churches are staggering. This generation is not of the mindset of previous aging generations. According to a Pew Research study, the typical Boomer does not believe old age begins until age 72. And the typical Boomer feels nine years younger than his or her chronological age.

So what are some of the implications for churches? Read these carefully. There are very few churches that will not feel the impact of retiring Boomers.

1. **They will have less money to give to churches.** Their predecessor generation, the Builders, have been the most generous to churches and other charitable organizations. But that oldest generation is fading quickly from the scene. Churches are already feeling the pain of the loss of income from that generation. And now another challenge is taking place. Boomers are retiring, which typically means lower income. And lower income means diminished giving to churches.

2. **Some will have more volunteer time.** But their retirement will break previous patterns. Many of these Boomers will continue to seek atypical retirement opportunities. There will be few “rocking chair” retirees among the Boomers. How can churches attract those Boomers who will have more discretionary time? Perhaps the next implication can answer that question.

3. **Most of the Boomers still want to change the world.** Many of them may be disillusioned after four decades of work that was not meaningful and life changing. But they still have the spirit of the 60s, a spirit that desires to be different and to make a difference. If congregations can offer retiring Boomers such opportunities, there could be a surge of Boomer church adherents.

4. **Many of the Boomers will be traveling more.** So some of our churches’ most faithful attendees will be conspicuously absent as they have this new discretionary time. They will be traveling for pleasure, visiting grandchildren, and traveling to places where they believe they can make a difference.

5. **Retiring Boomers will kill traditional church senior adult ministries.** The primary reason is that most of them don’t like to be categorized as senior adults. The secondary reason is they would be bored silly with some of the potlucks, travels, and activities of churches that attempt to keep their current senior adults happy.

Church leaders are confronted with many challenges in culture and in changing church practices. The pace of change can be frustrating. In the midst of all these changes, a huge generation is retiring. The implications for churches are nothing less than staggering.

**What do these implications mean for your church? What is your church doing today to reach and minister to retiring Boomers?**

http://thomrainer.com/2014/05/19/five-implications-churches-boomers-retire/
Boomers: A New Kind of Aging?
by Dr. Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., D. Min.

Beginning January 1, 2011, leading edge Boomers started turning sixty-five! Most congregations that are intentional in ministries with older adults have already started engaging this generation in ministry. Others are just beginning to wonder who and what is this generation.

Boomers (a.k.a. Baby Boomers) are a post-World War II generation. Most demographers indicate that Boomers were born in the years 1946-1964. There are approximately seventy-eight million Boomers in the U.S. In 2011, every eight seconds a Boomer will turn sixty-five, roughly ten thousand per day.

There are many myths often attributed to Boomers. Here are just five such myths:

1. *Boomers are all alike.* False. Boomers are a diverse, multi-faceted, and complex generation.

2. *Boomers are all college educated.* False. While Boomers have the greatest rate of higher education, more than twenty-five percent of Boomer men and twenty-three percent of Boomer women have at least a college degree, seventy-five percent do not have degrees.

3. *Boomers are spoiled, self-centered, and materialistic.* False. While Boomers have always acted in ways that are contrary to the behavior of the Builder Generation that preceded them, Boomers consider family and friends the most important and satisfying aspects of their lives.

4. *All Boomers went to Woodstock.* False. Approximately five hundred thousand people attended this famous musical event in Bethel, New York, in August 1969, a very small fraction of the total generation.

5. *Boomers are not interested in faith concerns or spirituality.* False. Boomers are looking for ways to find meaning and purpose in their lives. They are open to religious and spiritual engagement.

Perhaps because this is such a large generation, there aren’t Boomers who fit every description, interest, habit, plan, or activity attributed to them by the media. But there are some things that can be said about most Boomers. For example, the concept of "anti-aging" has captured the interest of today’s Boomers, making them a huge market for products such as nutritional supplements and "anti-wrinkle" creams and lotions. Boomers will do much to keep themselves young, and that includes looking and acting youthful.

Another example, Boomers do not identify with the label "older adult" nor with such labels as "senior citizen," "elder," and "retirees." Address them in any of these ways and most Boomers will refer you to their parents. Labeling Boomers as "older adults" isn’t always helpful and may actually hinder your ministry. Since Boomers are no longer "babies," you might want to avoid calling this generation "Baby Boomers." If you need to identify this group, you might want to try: Boomers, Midlife Adults, Active Adults, or Seekers. The best way is to simply ask a group of Boomers in your church what they want to call their Sunday School class or a particular ministry for adults.

Sometimes this generation is divided into two groups: Early Boomers (1946-1954) and Late Boomers (1955-1964). Because of social-economic and political influences taking place in the world during these years, Boomers have had different experiences. The Early Boomers are often associated with individualism, experimentation, anti-war and civil rights movements. The Late Boomers are most often associated with general cynicism, less optimism, and fewer opportunities. But, for the purpose of this article and our concern related to aging and older adult ministries, I am giving more attention to Early Boomers.
Some Boomers are already retired or are thinking about retirement. But, many Boomers will continue working well beyond the "normal" retirement years. The reasons for this variety:

- Can't afford to retire
- Have continuing career interests
- Want to stay productive
- Work gives them meaning
- Dwindling or little retirement investments
- Healthcare needs and costs

Presently in the U.S., on average, one job in five is held by an employee old enough to be retired. Mandatory retirement has been illegal in the U.S. since 1980, and the average age of retirement is currently sixty-three years old and will probably increase to age sixty-seven by 2025. Rising life expectancy and poor economic conditions will force many Boomers to keep working after sixty years of age. This trend may have serious consequences on the job market if too many Boomers choose to work beyond the traditional retirement age.

Congregations wanting to be intentional in ministry with Boomers will accept this generation for who they are. Churches will:

- Offer a variety of entry points where Boomers can meet others
- Develop activities that engage Boomers for their own sakes, not just for their children
- Provide opportunities for meaningful service and mission
- Schedule activities that nurture the reflective life (e.g., journaling, prayer, meditation)
- Form small groups and support systems
- Recognize that many Boomers will be working well beyond the "normal" retirement age and may not provide the same degree of volunteer service as the Builder generation
- Realize that Boomers have a tendency to financially support "a cause" rather than simply give to the "general fund" of the local church.

Keep in mind, Boomers do not think of themselves as older adults and, as such, have very little interest in the current design of most older adult ministries. Rather than asking Boomers to participate in an existing older adult ministry, a new group designed specifically for Boomers should be started.

While it is not clear what this ministry will look like as Boomers age, I believe that it will be an exciting and challenging opportunity for congregations. Psycho-social, biological, spiritual, and economic issues will greatly impact the well-being of aging Boomers and how the church responds to the needs of aging Boomers will determine the health and vitality of most congregations. How is your congregation preparing to meet the needs of aging Boomers? What are ways you are helping Boomers find meaning and purpose in their later years?

The Reverend Dr. Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. is the former Director of the Center on Aging and Older Adult Ministries for the General Board of Discipleship. He is author of numerous books and articles on mid-life and older adult ministries. His most recent book Aging and Ministry in the 21st Century: An Inquiry Approach (Discipleship Resources, 2008) includes a chapter on Boomer Ministry.
The New Frontier: Boomers or Bust!
by Jennifer R. Pasco

The United Methodist Church has figured prominently in the forming of new frontiers. During the 1700s, John Wesley, founder of the church, began the work of touching lives in the steel mills of England. The work continued on the American Frontier in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Circuit riders, ministers on horseback, extended the church in America by reaching the early settlers in isolated territories. The work of those circuit riders continues as the church begins to reach out to a new aging generation called the "baby boomers."

Sociologists have labeled each generation with a name that reflects the characteristics of that generation. The boomers are a generation of adults born between 1946 and 1964. The baby boomers were the result of a change in culture and signified the end of World War II, the war to end all wars. During World War II, women, left behind by men going to war, began to fill the jobs vacated by these men. The work that the women on the home front found was in major metropolitan areas. This was a change in the structure of society -- women working and people residing in urban communities rather than rural.

When the men returned from war, employment remained in the cities, and the families made their homes in the metropolitan areas. The birth rates quickly escalated after WWII. From the increased birth rate came a generation that sociologists labeled baby boomers.

This generation is the new frontier for The United Methodist Church. Early members of the boomer generation were involved in the church in their youth. These boomers expanded the membership of The United Methodist Church to epic proportions in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It is to the church that the boomers will turn to answer their questions of aging. The development and needs will be different from the current senior population. The boomers may be plagued with more chronic illnesses. They will seek answers to issues and needs centering on current experiences. The term "sandwich generation" is being applied to boomers. The boomers are finding that they are caring for their children, grandchildren, and aging parents and finding themselves to be the glue that holds the family together. This added responsibility will increase both the stress and spirituality of the boomers. This generation will need assistance to work through the challenges that face them in years to come.

The challenges will need to be organized by older-adult leaders. Leaders will need to be hired or volunteers put in place to organize the boomers' requirements. This new frontier is now upon the UMC, as 2011 will bring the first boomers into retirement age. This shift in programming will fall to annual conferences and local churches to develop the courses for meeting baby boomer challenges.

How will the church meet the demands created by the baby boomer generation? Is the church equipped to do this? Can The United Methodist Church be a leader in the religious growth of the boomers? What will these programs look like? There are definitely more questions than there are answers, but it is time for church leaders to develop curriculum that will fulfill the boomers' needs.

The doors are open to a multitude of ideas and planning. How The United Methodist Church responds to the boomers can or will lead to the growth and stability of the church. How General Conference and annual conferences develop the material and direction can or will lead to powerful senior programming and open the church doors wide to encompass this large population.

Many scholars have presented suggested answers to the questions, but the programs are still being developed. I see the need to address topics such as spirituality, Bible study, end-of-life issues, gender, ethnicity, age, health, and finally, mission work. Boomers will ask questions such as: "Where or who is God in my life?" "How does the Bible relate to who I am?" "How or why do I need to pray?" "How does..."
my chronic illness affect my relationship with God and the church and define who I am?” These are not easy questions, and the answers will not be easy.

Are you ready to begin? Is the local church, district, and conference where you live striving toward solutions? Have you asked? Now is the time to begin the process.

Jennifer R. Pasco is an ordained elder of the Oklahoma Conference. She is a graduate of the University of Texas—San Antonio and Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa, Oklahoma. She holds a B.A. in Sociology and an MDiv. Her area of study included research and papers on the care and programming of older adults. She may be contacted through email at txflwr48@aol.com.

**Baby Boomers' Defining Characteristics Could Help Them Redefine Aging in America**

by Rhonda L. Randall, D.O.

Since making their debut in 1946, baby boomers have been a major force for social change in the United States. Their epic numbers and independent spirit have influenced everything from politics to pop culture, transformed the make-up of the American family and workforce, reshaped societal norms, and created our modern notion of consumerism. Boomers have redefined each phase of life, and they’re expected to do the same as they age. Last year, the oldest boomers turned 65, marking the start of monumental growth in the senior population.

Earlier this month, I participated in a panel discussion about what the aging of the baby boomers will mean for our country. The discussion, which included Arianna Huffington and a few other experts on aging, was part of the Aging in America Conference, the annual meeting of the American Society on Aging.

With 77 million people in their ranks, boomers are expected to intensify many of the challenges already facing our country, and much of the discussion among my fellow panelists focused on those challenges.

While it’s true that aging boomers will impact our communities’ resources and the programs and services that provide necessary support to older Americans, it’s also important to recognize that some of the defining characteristics of this generation should serve them well throughout their retirement years. Boomers should take heart knowing that what makes their generation unique could make their senior years healthier and more enjoyable than they might expect them to be.

#1

Boomers desire to be active and maintain their well-being throughout retirement. Just as boomers revolutionized our society in their youth, they’re expected to revolutionize what it means to age in America. Most experts who study this demographic agree that the way boomers will live out their retirement years will look very different from the historical, stereotypical image of senior citizens. Medical advances will enable boomers to live longer than any generation that’s come before them, so rather than retiring into the background of our society, more boomers will remain vibrant and active throughout their retirement years than was the case of previous generations.

So boomers who love Zumba, yoga and walking clubs should be proud of their commitment to health and
wellness and put it to good use. Maintaining an exercise regimen will help ward off the effects of chronic conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes and some cancers, and will do wonders for their overall mental and physical health, helping them enjoy life to the fullest.

Boomers should talk with their physician about an exercise plan that can keep them feeling fit for decades to come. Exercise classes focused on maintaining good balance such as Tai Chi or those that are specifically geared for older adults could be a good option. They're a great way to improve stamina and avoid injuries while also meeting like-minded new friends. And if they're already enrolled in Medicare, they should look for a plan that offers coverage of a fitness club membership.

#2
More boomers are college graduates than any generation before them. As compared to their parents’ and grandparents’ generations, boomers were far more likely to earn a college degree and hold white-collar jobs. This all translates to a lot of knowledge and skills that shouldn't go to waste as this generation heads into retirement.

Many boomers are pursuing second careers or taking on part-time jobs, partly out of financial necessity but also in part because boomers likely derived much satisfaction from their careers and professional accomplishments. Just because they've reached traditional retirement age doesn't mean those opportunities to learn, earn and grow have to stop. Boomers who want to continue contributing to society but not necessarily in a traditional job setting should embrace the opportunity to pass on what they've learned to younger generations by volunteering.

They can also challenge their minds by staying actively engaged in maintaining their health. They can find a wealth of accurate information from reputable sources online or at their local bookstore, providing plenty of opportunities to read about managing chronic conditions, preventing health problems and enhancing physical, emotional and mental well-being. Boomers should take advantage of the information and resources at their fingertips and apply what they learn by making changes to their lifestyle and bringing a list of questions to their next doctor's appointment.

However they choose to stay mentally fit and engaged in their community, they should feel good knowing that their professional success will continue to bring rewards to both themselves and our broader society as they and their fellow boomers enter retirement.

#3
Boomers are savvier, more discerning consumers than previous generations of seniors. Their size and buying power prompted companies to ramp up production of consumer goods, which multiplied their options for everything from socks to cars. And they typically had money to spend on these options given that they're more likely than their parents’ and grandparents’ generations to live in dual-income households, creating more income to spend on the myriad consumer goods at their disposal. These dynamics shaped boomers into status-conscious, sophisticated shoppers. Rather than sticking with the tried-and-true, they're more likely to switch products until they find the one that meets all their needs.

Boomers' buying habits are likely to affect how they approach health care decisions as they age, creating another opportunity for them to apply their savvy shopping skills. Every day, 10,000 boomers are becoming eligible for Medicare, and many are realizing that our nation's largest health insurance program is not always easy to understand. It can be tough to make sense of Medicare's multiple parts, costs, eligibility requirements and enrollment rules.

Fortunately for boomers, they're already accustomed to sifting through dozens of options to find a solution that best fits their needs, and that's exactly the same approach they should take to Medicare. Boomers who are new to Medicare or will be enrolling soon should use their shopping skills as they
explore their options. They should make a list of what's most important to them in their health care coverage, and use that list to evaluate the plans available in their area. Doing so will increase the odds that they'll find coverage that meets their health and financial needs.

However they choose to view the aging process, boomers should know that much of how they experience aging is within their control and strongly influenced by their personal choices. Getting older will hopefully happen to all of us, but that doesn't mean we have to follow the same model of aging as the generations that have come before us. And who better to shift our country's perception of what it means to be an active and healthy older adult than the boomers?

Rhonda L. Randall, D.O., is chief medical officer for UnitedHealthcare Medicare & Retirement, the nation's largest business dedicated to the health and well-being needs of seniors and other Medicare beneficiaries. Article found at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rhonda-l-randall-do/baby-boomers-redefining-aging_b_1448949.html Posted: 04/24/2012

Introduction to Boomer Spirituality: Seven Values for the Second Half of Life
By Craig Kennet Miller
September 7, 2016

Change can happen as the result of sudden events, like Pearl Harbor or 9/11, which can turn history on a dime and set the forces of culture in a new direction. Or change can happen as the result of political decisions lived into over time — like the evolving history of the United States since its birth as a nation or the Chinese revolution of Mao that shaped the lives of more than a billion people since 1949.

The change we are talking about in Boomer Spirituality – demographic change – is different. Demographic change comes with a timeline that gives us a past, the present, and a presumed future of a generation. As the result of a high birth rate in the United States from 1946 to 1964, the baby boomer generation has had an impact on every phase of life. Born after World War II, boomers have made their mark on each stage of the lifespan by virtue of their sheer numbers. Whether it was scooping up coonskin hats, hula hoops, and Barbie Dolls when they were children, or embracing the ethos of rock’n’roll when they were teenagers, or getting in on housing boom of the 1990s, this generation has long asserted its influence on the American culture.

Boomers are now in the second half of life (age fifty and older). Because of longer life spans, more people are living into their eighties and nineties. Some will live past one hundred.
In 2016, the oldest boomer turned seventy, while the youngest turned fifty-two. By 2026, the oldest boomer will be eighty, and the youngest will be sixty-two.

At first glance, this may not seem to be a big deal – until you do the math. From now until 2029, ten thousand boomers will retire every day. The number of people over the age of sixty-five in the United States will grow from 48 million in 2015 to 74 million in 2030. By 2050, the number of adults over the age of sixty-five will increase to more than 89 million.[1]

It’s hard to understand the implications of these numbers. At no time in history has there been such a large number of people over sixty-five years of age actively engaged in life. Because of scientific breakthroughs in medical technology, food preparation, and health care, people are living longer, much longer. While we may laugh at statements like “sixty is the new fifty,” the second half of life for boomers will be much different from that of previous generations.
Are We Ready?

The reality is our society is ill prepared for the demographic wave that is coming our way. The idea that retirement is a reward for work well done is long over. The concept of the endless vacation free of responsibility is just not feasible for most people. The image of a walled oasis of golf, swimming, and frequent trips to the local casino is not a reality for most of those approaching retirement age.

Recently I was at a meeting with a group of pastors and leaders. The chair of the meeting had been retired for about six months. Before retirement she served in a leadership position in her denomination. She had responsibility for managing a group of staff plus putting together programs and training for hundreds of pastors and laity. Suddenly in the middle of the meeting, she broke down in tears: “You don’t know what it’s like out there. My church and the senior center treat us like we are mindless infants with nothing to do.”

She explained that the goal of the older-adult ministries at her church and the senior center in her community was to keep people entertained and give them something to do with their time. “They don’t recognize us for what we can offer, for the people we are. I’m not dead yet!” This vibrant, talented, and experienced woman had run headfirst into a world that was designed for the senior life of years past. When she is 85, maybe this is what she will need. But now, she needs to be challenged, to have opportunities to serve, and she needs to be valued.

Boomers have always wanted to make a difference in the world. And in many ways they have. Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Steven Spielberg, Meryl Streep, and Oprah Winfrey are just some of the names that crop up when we think of boomers.

Some might think that as boomers head toward their older-adult years, their time is past. Nothing could be further from the truth. Whether it’s in the business world, the political world, the religious world, or the entertainment world, boomers will still make their mark. In fact, we are on the verge of transforming what it means to be over sixty. In the coming decades, some aspects of older age will get better, especially in the arena of medical advances, the use of digital technology to connect with family and friends, and the convenience of businesses that bring goods and services directly to the home.

But other aspects of aging are going to prove daunting. The boomers who have managed their finances well, who have saved for their retirement years, who have developed a network of supportive friends and family, who see their lives as having purpose and meaning, will enjoy a golden age unlike any generation before them.

But the boomers who have not been able to save, who lost jobs during the Great Recession, who live with broken relationships, and who are totally dependent on government services such as Social Security and Medicare, are a different story. Their financial, medical, housing, social, and spiritual needs will affect every aspect of American society well into the future.

Boomers Returning to the Values of their Youth

As much as we would like to think that people change their values over time, it would be more accurate to say generations are shaped by the experiences and events of their childhood and youth. These experiences and events turn into ideals that stay with a generation throughout its life. Now that boomers are entering their post-work life they are returning to the values of their youth.
Boomer Spirituality invites you to explore the values of brokenness, loneliness, rootlessness, and self-seeking which form the spiritual roots of boomers. Born out of the crucible of 1960s and 1970s, these values still inform their relationships with society and with the people around them. Much of the rancorous debates we see in our political sphere are the result of unresolved issues between first-wave boomers who embraced the counter-culture as young adults and those who held on to the values of their parent's generation.

Godliness, supernaturalism, and wholeness capture the boomers unique search for God as they look toward a future that is filled with peril and promise. The heated debates in Christian denominations over cultural issues find their beginnings in the religious revolts of the 1970s and 1980s when a large portion of boomers gravitated to the new age movement or eschewed the traditional mainline churches in favor of the non-denominational mega-churches that now dominate the American religious scene.

As boomers age these issues will not suddenly disappear. They will be amplified as younger generations wrestle with how to take care of an aging generation who wants to stay young, who relishes its freedom, and whose rampant individualism has led to broken relationships and diminished financial resources.

If you are a boomer, you are sure to be reminded of the events and experiences that had an impact on you when you were young. If you are the child or grandchild of a boomer, perhaps this book will help you understand why your parents or grandparents act the way they do. If you are creating ministry for this generation, then this will be a guide to the way boomers view the world and look toward the future.

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Introduction from the website for his new book: https://boomerspirituality.org/category/craig-kennet-miller/