

"Generation Gap" from Chapter 1 (pp.5-8), *Transforming Stewardship*, Robertson, C. K.

"One size does not fit all when it comes to shoes. How much more is this true of people! *The Book of Common Prayer* speaks of 'all sorts and conditions' of people, yet many churches ignore the importance of differences, especially generational differences....Researchers separate people into various generational groupings to designate their characteristics and differences. While these groups clearly represent some generalizations that do not accurately describe all those within the respective categories, there are some consistent patterns in the groups which are worth noting:

- *Elders*: (also know as Builders and the G.I. Generation). Characterized by Tom Brokaw as "the greatest generation," these are the people who came of age during the Great Depression and the World War II and Korean War years. They are marked by respect for authority, brand loyalty, commitment to save (money), obligation to family (including extended family), traditional values and roles, desire for higher education for their children, and a tendency to stay in one locale ("family home").
- *Baby Boomers*: Born during the postwar baby boom between 1945 and 1963, these are often known as the "Children of the Sixties." Their defining memories are not World War II but the Vietnam conflict, not FDR but JFK, not Big Band but rock and roll. The most educated generation in American history to that point, these are the progeny of parents who still lived largely traditional roles and spoke of giving their children "the things they did not have." Boomers are marked by their questioning of authority, a hunger for a deep and meaningful spirituality, and the importance of personal relevance.
- *Generation X*: The so-called Gen Xer was born during the Age of Aquarius and then came of age during Reaganomics and the rise of neo-conservatism. Witnessing the results of their older siblings' excesses and the domestication of that previous generation's idealism, these baby Gen Xers are strong realists, recognizing the importance of personal control over finances, health care, and retirement. They have more income, yet far less time, and they often complain of stress and burnout. Small groups and a few intimate friends are crucial, while group membership with demands on time and energy are avoided.
- *Millennials*: Also know as Generation Y or Mosaics, this is the most recent group to arrive, and the first generation in a very long time to have a predicted future look more bleak than that of their parents, though technologically, they are the most savvy.

Researchers have become much more insistent that we take seriously the considerable differences between generations, especially when focusing on matters involving group membership, time commitments, and financial giving. Note the following statistics from the Barna research group (www.barna.org):

- Millennials are much less likely than any other generation to volunteer time to their church: 12 percent of Millennials report volunteering in the past week, while conversely, 23 percent of Gen Xers, 29 percent of boomers, and 34 percent of Elders have volunteered in the past week.

- Small-group participation appears to be positively correlated with age, with 26 percent of Elders, 24 percent of Boomers, 19 percent of Gen Xers, and 20 percent of Millennials reporting that they participated in a small group in the past week.
- Compared to 60 percent of Builders who have a private prayer/devotional time during the week, 54 percent of Boomers, 39 percent of Gen Xers, and 35 percent of Millennials do the same.
- 33 percent Millennials, 43 percent of Gen Xers, 49 percent of Boomers, and 53 percent of Elders attend church on a given Sunday.
- In a typical week, 32 percent of Millennials, 42 percent of Gen Xers, 47 percent of Boomers, and 58 percent of Elders read the Bible.
- In a given week, 65 percent of Millennials, 82 percent of Gen Xers, 90 percent of Boomers, and 88 percent of Elders (Builders and Seniors) report praying to God.
- Boomers emerge as more likely (53 percent) and Millennials as less likely (33 percent) than any other generation to report being "born again" (with 38 percent of Gen Xers and 48 percent of Elders).
- Millennials are the least likely age group to indicate that faith is a very important part of their life: only 51 percent of Millennials say their faith is very important in their life, compared with 62 percent of Gen Xers, 73 percent of Boomers, and 79 percent of Elders.
- Gen Xers are more likely than other generations to be searching for meaning in life: 44 percent of Gen Xers compared to 32 percent of all others.
- Gen Xers are the generation most likely to feel "too busy": 53 percent of Gen Xers maintain that they are too busy, compare to 49 percent of boomers, and less than 32 percent of Elders.
- Financial comfort appears to come with age: 38 percent of Gen Xers say they are personally struggling with finances, compared to 32 percent of Boomers, and less than 23 percent of Elders.
- Gen Xers are almost twice as likely as Elders to indicate that they are "stressed out" (41 percent to less than 27 percent). Likewise, 32 percent of Boomers said that "stressed out" is an accurate description of them.

What is perhaps most interesting about these statistics is how little attention is paid to them by most mainline churches. As a result, congregations continue to use one-size-fits-all approach to much of what they do, including stewardship. A letter goes out to everyone asking for an increase in their pledges-a single letter saying the same thing. A person gets in the pulpit and tells a story about why pledging is so important to them-one story being told to everyone at once. Yet, as suggested above, the methods and the words that an Elder will appreciate are not likely going to work in the same way with a Boomer or Gen Xer. A more holistic approach to stewardship and education is not only wise, but absolutely necessary. If this is important in terms of the members we already have, it is even more imperative when we begin to look at the people who have not yet come in our doors."