



Looming senior adult revolution to impact nation

by Chuck Kelley, posted Tuesday, May 19, 2015

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NEW ORLEANS (BP) -- Something is happening that you may not have noticed. If you have noticed it, you may not fully appreciate its significance. It will affect you. It will affect your church. It will affect the whole nation.

What's happening is a senior adult revolution.

Some call it the graying of America, but that is too gentle a term for what lies ahead. It is more like a '60s remix. The 1960s were the most turbulent, revolutionary years in modern American history. Every aspect of U.S. culture was affected, including the church. Now picture the '60s reimagined and reinvented: profound changes in American life driven by grandparents rather than college students, by retirement living and health care rather than drugs and rock 'n' roll.

The unprecedented generation

Here is the revolution in a nutshell: According to Ken Dychtwald in the "The Age Wave," "two-thirds of all the men and women who have lived beyond the age of 65 in the entire history of the world are alive today." Ponder that for a few moments. Dychtwald goes on to note that life expectancy for Americans doubled in the relatively brief history of our nation, creating for the first time "a mass society of healthy, active elders."

Not since the days of Noah has God given a generation extended life, good health and adequate resources. Today the fastest-growing segment of the senior adult population is the 85-and-up group. The birthdays you celebrate now are practice for the birthdays you will celebrate for many years to come.

The ripple effect

The simple fact of senior adults living longer sets in motion many ripples. Older adults will be an important influence in our churches for a significantly longer time than was true in the past. They

will not only be present, they will be active. They will not only be active, they will be vocal. This is one reason why attitudes toward worship style have become so complex for many congregations.

In most congregations, a strategic plan for the future that does not incorporate the needs, values and gifts of senior adults is incomplete.

Older adults will make attention to pastoral care essential for healthy churches. A growing number of senior adults will move from independent living to assisted living to life in a skilled nursing unit. How will the church minister to them as they make these very important transitions? How will the church incorporate their presence in a retirement community as a launching pad for evangelism and ministry to other residents of that community?

Senior adults will affect the lifestyles and decisions of younger adults. A growing number of church members will have the care of one or more senior parents as a priority. Imagine the questions and issues faced by Baby Boomers who will retire and still have responsibility for the care of aging parents. This will affect how families spend their time, their money and their emotional energy. A church's attitude toward, and provisions for, senior adults will be noticed in a way not unlike how parents look carefully at programs for their children.

A Great Commission army

This senior adult revolution is more than a medical advance. As the number of unevangelized and unchurched in our nation grows, God is raising up a Great Commission army. He intends for senior adults to form the critical mass necessary for the Gospel to penetrate the world. Their opinions will shape direction. Their willingness to give will affect fiscal stability. Their engagement with the mission will be crucial for mobilizing congregations. God intends for senior adults to step up to missions engagement and not step aside for younger adults to do all the work.

The current generation of young adults is often called the Millennials. I call them the Lost Generation. They are the largest generation in American history, bigger even than the Baby Boomers. They are also the most unevangelized generation in American history. So many of them have no religious background; they are also called "nones" for responding to surveys about religious background and beliefs with "none of the above." However, connections with senior adults are possible. Millennials made Tony Bennett, popular in the 1960s, more popular than at any other time of his career. Their interest in the classic hymns of the faith has spurred every major Christian artist today to record at least one album of hymns. They have a deep respect for authenticity and consistency. We are unlikely to reach the Millennials without the witness of the seniors.

How can senior adults make a difference?

Here are some specific suggestions:

- Write cards and notes to people. Children and their parents are a good place to start. Personal mail is so rare these days that handwritten cards and notes become treasures.
- Be a mentor to younger adults. Get to know the ones around you. Ask about their lives. Listen to them. Pray for them. When they face issues you faced, tell them how you managed. Be a grandparent outside your family.
- Seek Kingdom advance above personal satisfaction. You lived much of your life deferring dreams and desires for the sake of your family. Be willing to do the same when your church wants to try something new.
- Encourage, encourage, encourage. So few people have a constant encourager in their lives.
- Speak as often of Jesus as you do your grandkids. If you will keep Jesus on your mind, He will find a way out of your mouth.
- Give one last gift to Jesus through your estate. Honor Him in your death as you sought to do in your life, making your last act on earth a gift to your church or a Christian ministry.

Not since the days of Noah has God done for a generation of people what He is doing for this generation of senior adults. Celebrate your extended life, health and resources as His gift for His purposes. Use these additional years for His glory.

This article first appeared in the Baptist Courier (www.baptistcourier.com), newsjournal of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

Original URL: <http://www.bpnews.net/44783/looming-senior-adult-revolution-to-impact-nation>