

Another Look: Generations, Demographics and the Ministry of the Church
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One of the great challenges before the contemporary church relates to the unique dynamics of people born into different generational or demographic groups. Recent articles in *Christian Chronicle* have addressed ministry to youth and ministry to singles. While there always exists the danger of over-generalizing, most would agree that each generation or group brings perspectives and behaviors formed in large part by the world around them as they grew up. I have been studying and thinking about the generational phenomenon for over 20 years since my research advisor in my master's thesis work pointed me toward a study of Baby Boomers and their impact on the church.

A recent book on this topic (July 2008) is *The Age Curve* by Kenneth Gronbach. The subtitle, *How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Storm*, reveals the author's interest in the implications of generational research for business, marketing and branding. However, the book is worthwhile for anyone interested in the impact of different generations—G.I., Silent, Baby Boom, Gen X and Gen Y. Gronbach points out that we mistakenly tend to believe and act as though each generation is roughly the same size as the generations before and after it. He shows that it is not only the attitudes and behaviors of each generation that make an impact on business, government, politics, education and the economy, but also the relative size of each generational group.

There are many implications for the church. How well are our congregations doing in understanding the impact of various generations or sub-groups on congregational life, and the opportunities for Gospel outreach and faith nurturing within each generation or group? How should paid and volunteer staff be positioned in congregations? Traditionally staff has been dedicated to certain age or demographic groups—youth, college, singles, young adults, older adults—with members served as they move through these groups. What if, instead, congregations established programs and positioned leaders to meet the unique needs and opportunities of a particular generation, and the leaders and programs stayed with this group of people as they aged? This question reminds me of a change made in many high schools when, instead of having one school guidance counselor serving 9th graders, another serving 10th graders, and so on each year, counselors were assigned to the same group of students throughout their high school years.

Generational awareness opens the door for intergenerational ministry possibilities. Imagine Gen Xers and those in the Silent Generation benefiting from each other's experiences and perspectives and developing authentic mutual caring and mentoring relationships. The church could minister to people who no longer benefit from extended family relationships. It is essential that the church develop new ministries and consider creative ways to bring health and hope in Christ with sensitivity to generations.

Put on your thinking cap and think outside the box. What are some of the ways the church could rethink its ministry to serve more effectively as we share the gospel, nurture faith, and encourage discipleship and fellowship?