

## **INTERWOVEN GENERATIONS: LIVING FAITH INTERGENERATIONALLY**

By Michele Hendrix

Remember the surge in a generation of young people in the late 40's through the mid 60's? History has shown the enormous effect of this generation known as Baby Boomers on social services, education, the labor market, the culture, and the church for the past 72 years. Baby Boomers number about 74.1 million. Millennials (1981-1996) now surpass the Boomers at 75 million. Many churches are finding they are more effective in fulfilling their mission by engaging the generations. By making this connection, taking on a new focus, adding new purpose, and becoming more outreach oriented, churches are consequently finding those of all ages that were previously unreached in the church and community AND welcoming them into the community of faith. All ages are involved in working, serving, learning, and sharing their gifts in every aspect of ministry and in all ministry areas.

In this new decade of 2020 and for many past years we have recognized that leaders in OAM and older adults are trailblazers in today's culture - advocating for themselves, their families, their peers, and their communities - paving the way for future generations and the church to promote and engage in activity, wellness, care and social involvement. As one of the five Age and Stage Covenant Partners in Presbyterian Mission Agency's (PMA), Christian Formation, our focus in 2020 is on Older Adult Ministry with Intergenerational engagement and the value of such a ministry within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The five Age to Stage Covenant Partners in Christian Formation are POAMN, APCE (Association of Presbyterian Christian Educators), UKirk (Collegiate Ministries), PCCCA (Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association), and PYWA (Presbyterian Youth Workers' Association).

For almost 40 years POAMN, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been providing the framework for recognizing the gifts and challenges of growing older in the life of the church. We are a resource for all who are aging and the multiple generations working and serving in congregations, presbyteries, synods, care facilities, senior centers, hospitals, non-profit organizations, or veteran facilities. Our denomination and our congregations are well into the fastest growing segment of our population and congregations - the 65+ and the 85+ generations. Yet, how many of our churches see older adult ministry as peripheral, perfunctory, or even optional?

Congregations need to think through the issues of ministering to a new aging group that is increasingly disillusioned with the traditional church, yet longs for community, meaning, and deep spirituality. Multiple generations are facing issues unique to their generation, from parenting grandchildren, parenting their parents, to dealing with the effects of chronic illness in their lives or the lives of loved ones or friends, and a multitude of other concerns such as caregiving, isolation, loneliness, and depression. For a number of years Builders then Boomer's were known as the Sandwich Generation," but now it is the Builders, Boomers, GenX'ers, and Millennials! They share the responsibilities for the care of parents and grandparents while still having parenting roles themselves. They need the church more than ever! It is important that we never

underestimate the power of ministry to aging adults in our society. It presents potential for church growth! This group is the largest group in membership in our denomination and in our congregations.

The largest age group in PC(U.S.A.) continues to be 65 and older, while young people, 25 and younger, make up the smallest group. Only 4 percent of our churches are 600 members or more. Approximately 24 percent of PC(U.S.A.) churches are running 600 or less, while 72 percent of our churches are running 150 or less. We need to look at the 150-member church as a good size church, but we have a hard time doing that. Susan Barnett compiled this information in the fall of 2019 for our GA offices. Were you aware that churches have access to their own statistics and can look back at the last ten years to see where they have been and where they are going? The biggest challenge is looking within, but not in a negative way. Look at the good things. For specific information about your congregation contact Susan Barnett in Research at PMA for the information, at [susan.barnett@pcusa.org](mailto:susan.barnett@pcusa.org).

Last May 2019 and again in October 2019 the PMA Covenant Partners from the five “ages and stages” ministry associations gathered to work with Christian Formation and in collaboration with one another. We were all in the same room, at the same time, with the same goal, to figure out how we might more collaboratively work together with the Presbyterian Mission Agency. These were very productive meetings and have brought us closer together in relationship to vision and dream about the possibilities that lie ahead for each group. We are looking forward as we continue building on these relationships and collaborate on ways we can bring the generations together as a family of faith.

The past five decades spanning from the time when the Silent Generation (today in their 70’s & 80’s) was entering adulthood to the adulthood of today’s Millennials we have seen large shifts in US society and culture. It has been a period during which Americans, especially Millennials, have become more detached from major institutions such as political parties, religion, the military and marriage. At the same time, the racial and ethnic make-up of the country has changed, college attainment has spiked and women have greatly increased their participation in the nation’s work force. These are just some of the realities we face and why it is so important to focus and find ways to connect the generations! That means a shift in thinking away from a senior group mentality and toward an intergenerational “maturing adult ministry” mentality that honors diversity of age, stage, personality, ethnicity, and spirituality.

This is an opportunity for the church to become missional focused and develop consistent relationships and partnerships with a compassionate response to reach out to its members, families, neighbors, and communities and address the needs for all ages in a variety of ways. It is also an opportunity for the church to come up with a compassionate response to reach out to its members and families who are caring for the chronically ill of all ages. By developing a comprehensive Older Adult Ministry that engages with the different generations your ministry can provide a comprehensive plan to raise awareness, connect the generations, and address the emerging crisis in

loneliness, health, caregiving, and faith issues that will cross generational and economic lines with emphasis on support of congregational programs for all generations.

POAMN endeavors to tackle the challenges of aging with expert solutions, and to redefine aging as a journey of spirituality, strength, growth, care and compassion. Our objective is to provide opportunities and services to meet the physical, intellectual, social, emotional, vocational and spiritual needs of an aging society with the tools, education, experience, wisdom, expertise, and knowledge to help all individuals - regardless of age - to thrive in the church and communities of their choice for as long as possible. We recognize that leaders and older adults are trailblazers in today's culture - advocating for themselves, their families, their peers, and their communities - paving the way for future generations and the church to promote and engage in activity, wellness, care and social involvement. All of us have a unique role and an important challenge to address the issues of growing older positively and proactively in today's vast and rapidly aging society.

***Ms. Michele Hendrix has served two terms as the President of POAMN. She has worked for over 25 years to advocate, educate, involve, and motivate people in the process of aging and self-care; and to recognize the connections among church, health care, non-profit, community, state, federal, and local agencies while encouraging adults of all ages in managing their self-care, chronic conditions, respite, and caregiving roles. Michele has focused her work on intergenerational and interfaith programs for adults, evidence-based health promotion, ministry programming and development, respite for caregivers, and fall-prevention programs. She is a Deacon, Stephen Leader, Caregiver Specialist, Speaker and Trainer with expertise in Older Adult Ministry, Intergenerational Ministry, and Caregiving for all ages.***