



Stewardship of Generations



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This can serve as a tremendous frustration for those in the parish. Since each generation is unique, no one approach to ministry will be effective across the board. That which appeals to the Traditionalist generation will serve as a serious turn off to the Boomers. Things connecting with the Millennial generation will cause the Boomers head-aches and heart-aches. The Generation X crowd might find something that tickles the fancy of the Millennials to be offensive. Add to that at this point we really are not sure what Generation Z; will crave and the Church will find itself scratching their heads and chasing after the wind all the while seeking the way to faithfully serve the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

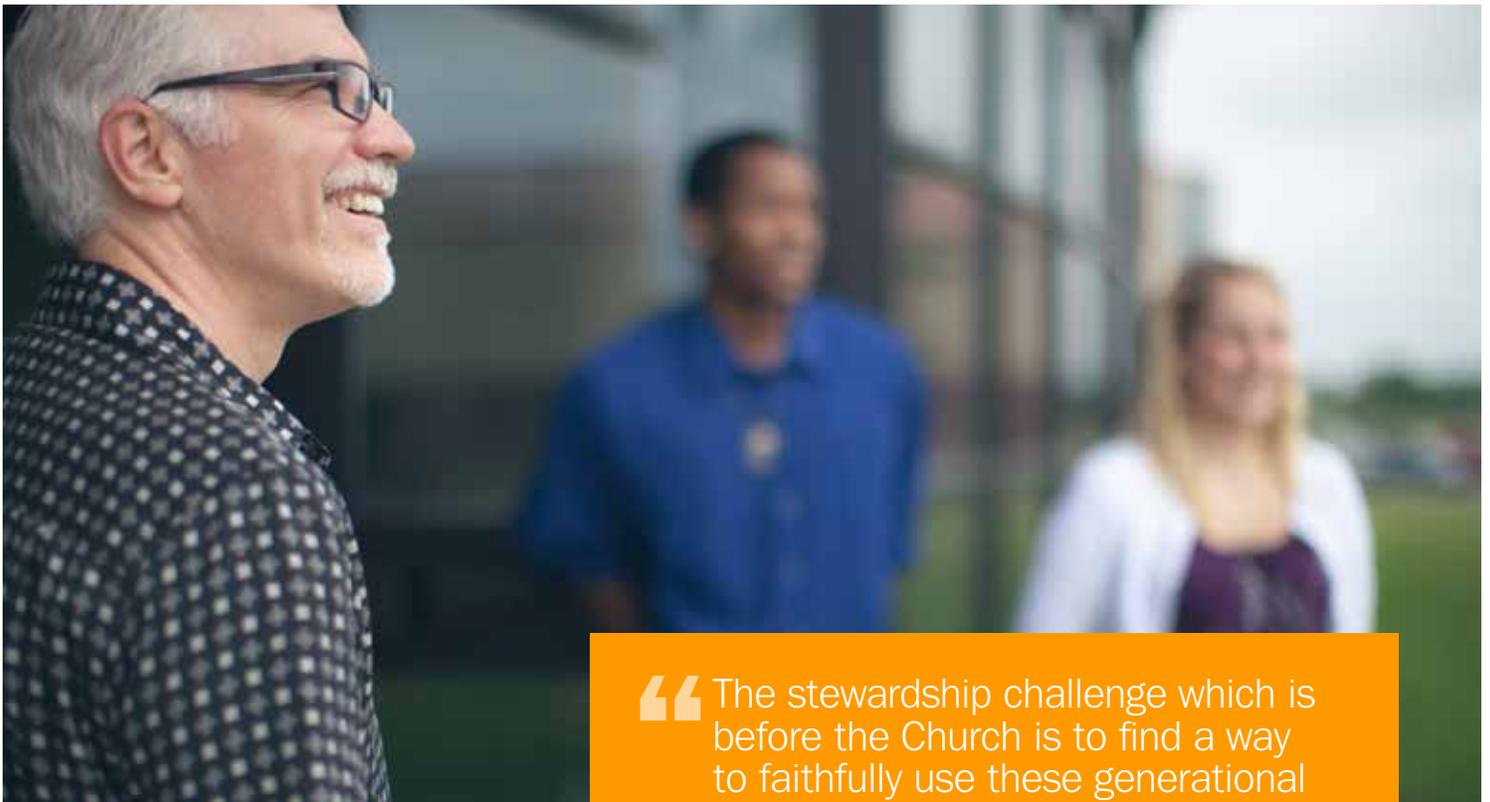
At a recent LCMS District Stewardship Leaders Conference a wonderful presentation was given by Hadyn Shaw. It was a presentation on stewardship with an emphasis on Christians in the Millennial Generation. Like most presentations it was chock-full of information that both edified and challenged those who heard it. Based largely on his recent book, *Generational IQ: Christianity isn't Dying, Millennials Aren't the Problem And the Future is Bright*, Shaw presented in such a way that district stewardship leaders and parish pastors were encouraged about the future.

Generational Firsts

What was most enlightening in the presentation was the fact that this is the first time in human history that we have five generations living and active at the same time: Traditionalists (born before 1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980), Millennials (born 1981-2001) and Generation Z (born after 2001). As a result of their unique experiences based on the era of their birth, each demographic has strengths and temptations. No generation is like the one before it. No one generation corners the market on strength. No one generation has become so degenerate that it is unreachable.

Many Members, One Body

The many unique and varied characteristics of each of the generations of our society, and also our congregations, should not be unexpected or a source of consternation. In fact, when one views the Biblical image of the way that the body is made up of many members and are yet one body, this should actually be a welcome concept for us to embrace. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 COR. 12:12).



“ The stewardship challenge which is before the Church is to find a way to faithfully use these generational blessings in service to the Gospel. ”

St. Paul spoke of the dysfunctional body of Christ at Corinth as the body of Christ. Does it make sense that the dysfunctionality that comes within the body of Christ as a result of the conflict between generations presents an insurmountable crisis within the body of Christ? Of course not!

The various strengths of the generations that Shaw cites in his book really serve as some great assets to the congregation which the Lord has placed in a particular location. The Traditionalists, whose strengths include cooperation, serving with lower expectations and financial generosity, are indeed great blessings to the local congregation. These strengths are the lifeblood of our current church culture. The Boomer's strength comes in that they see each individual member of the local congregation as important. This is a great blessing since the local congregation, while it is called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified and kept by the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel; is indeed made up of individual, fallen sinners who have been made redeemed saints. Generations X's desire for community, belief that all life is

spiritual vocation and the ability to value life and family over work, is also a tremendous blessing to the local congregation. Even the Millennial's strength of desiring meaning, authenticity and the value of team will all serve the local congregation well.

Challenges and Blessings

The stewardship challenge which is before the Church is to find a way to faithfully use these generational blessings in service to the Gospel. As we view the strengths which Shaw points out in each generation, we can clearly see how the body of Christ, which is for the first time made up of five generations, is positioned in such a way to be highly effective. But why is it that it seems that so many congregations are spinning their wheels when they are so blessed with these generations?

The answer is found in the fact that each generation tends only to see the flaws in the other generations, especially in the generation that immediately follows it. The Boomer's individualism is an affront to the cooperative nature of the Traditionalist and

the community seeking of the Xer's. The connectivity of the Millennials, who seem to always be on their phones and other electronic devices in search of authenticity, tend to set the Traditionalists and Xer's off!

But in this diversity of parts, the Lord introduces into the Church the cause for generational stewardship. Or, perhaps better said, the Church is now being called to consider stewardship of her generations! Each one of these generations cannot sustain the Church. It is not faithful at all to attempt to simply re-pristiniate the LCMS congregation of 1957 for the sake of the Traditionalist. Nor is it good stewardship to simply cater to the rebellious whims of the Boomers. Neither the cynicism of the Xer's nor the disconnected morality of the Millennials can be allowed to carry the day just for the sake of institutional survival, because these generations don't particularly care if the institution survives!

Rather, if the Church is to view stewardship of the generations which the Lord has entrusted to her in the same way as in the Pauline body metaphor from 1 Corinthians,

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it might well be that the Church is led to a new insight. When these gifted and tempted generations are not pitted against one another, but are seen as the integral parts of the Body of Christ in any given place, then the Church will live and move and have her being in strength.

The stewardship leaders in the congregation need to help Traditionalists to let go of control of having things the way they always have been for the sake of the succeeding generations. The Boomers need to be called to repentance on their self-centered sins that gave birth to the *ME* generation for the sake of those who come after them. With love and care, Xer’s can be led by God’s Word to see that the community they seek is a great blessing to the Church. Even the Millennials have a place in the body of Christ. Perhaps, as Shaw would suggest, the best way for them to see their place in the body is for them to become more directly connected to the Boomers. Could a group of newly retired Boomers take on a ministry of authentic communication with Millennial college students? Shaw suggests that this type of authenticity has worked in forging connections between the generations of a congregation.

The Living Church in a Dying World

The world tells us that the Church is dying; but that is exactly 180 degrees out of phase. It is the world that is dying. Those generations in your congregation that have strangely colored hair and piercings in places that you would have never considered piercing and are constantly staring at their phone — they aren’t the bad guys. They need what we have been given as a stewardship trust from the Lord: the Gospel.

Generational stewardship is about so much more than having enough money to keep the big old church semi-filled, heated and open to do the funerals of the Traditionalists and Boomers. It is about stewardship of the Gospel to the generations that follow. This is our task. It takes place through Word and Sacrament offered in settings that seek to be authentic and true to God’s Word without being encumbered with unnecessary baggage. The Holy Spirit has been working this stewardship through the generations. Now He gets to work on, in and through five at the same time! This isn’t a time of fear. It is a time for faithful stewardship of the best of God’s gifts ... the Gospel!

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