

Older Congregations Still Have Much to Offer on EthicsDaily.com

By: Dennis Bickers

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Older Congregations Still Have Much to Offer | Dennis Bickers, Older Adults, Boomers, Builders

We are so focused on trying to reach people who aren't in our churches that we fail to see those who are there and how they can reach out to others in their generations, Bickers writes.

I [reflected](#) recently on common issues smaller churches raise about why they are not able to do more than they are doing.

It is important to note that many of these issues are true and valid, but that does not mean they have to limit what the church is able to do.

One very common complaint I often hear has to do with the age of church members, and for many of our smaller churches it is true that many in their congregation are older people.

But why do we automatically think that having elderly people in a church limits what the church is capable of doing?

These are people who are often retired and have more available time to do things than some younger people might have.

These are the "builder" and "boomer" generations who are known for getting things done. Some are living very comfortably on their retirement accounts and have disposable income available for ministry purposes.

There is much our older church members can do to advance the Kingdom of God and increase our ministry presence in the community. The problem is that too often we fail to see these folks for the resource they are.

For example, too many churches seek to develop a youth ministry because "the youth are the future of our church."

What they fail to recognize is that it's very hard to develop a youth ministry when there are no youth in the church for a core group.

Maybe we would be better off to focus on reaching out to senior adults if that is our current core group. Do we really think every senior citizen is a Christian and active in a church somewhere?

Most would quickly admit that isn't the case, but we seldom think about that. We are so focused on trying to reach people who aren't in our churches that we fail to see those who are there and how they can reach out to others in their generations.

A member of a smaller church told me recently that they were discussing installing a new video system in their church so they could begin to attract younger people.

I am not opposed to video equipment, and in many churches they are needed, but I don't believe every church needs to make that investment.

This is an older congregation located in a small community primarily made up of senior citizens.

Do the church leaders really think that by installing a video system in their church that will cost them several thousand dollars, according to this one lay leader, it will cause young people to magically appear in their congregation? Sadly, that is their hope.

Would it not be a much better use of their resources to become involved in the community in ways that would be meaningful to the senior citizens who live there that would build relationships between those people and the church?

Too many churches want to put their senior saints out to pasture, and that is a huge waste of human potential.

One of the most energetic pastors I've ever known continued to pastor churches until he was in his early 80s. I first met him when he was in his 70s, and I initially judged him to be in his mid-50s.

Health issues finally caused him to leave the pastorate, but he continues to be involved in the life of his church.

Personally, I celebrated my 65th birthday last week. I may have slowed down a little, but most people couldn't tell it. If someone tries to put me out to pasture, I'll break through the fence and find a new field to run in.

Having an older congregation does not have to limit the ministry of a church unless they choose to allow it to do so.

Church-growth people have known for years that churches tend to attract who they are. If you are in a church made up primarily of senior adults, then develop ministries for seniors and encourage your members to invite their friends to be a part of those ministries.

Stop fantasizing about developing a great youth ministry and use the resources God has already provided. More than likely you'll find great ministry opportunities when you do so.

***Dennis Bickers** served as the bivocational pastor of Hebron Baptist Church near Madison, Ind., for 20 years before accepting his current position as a resource minister with the American Baptist Churches*

of Indiana and Kentucky. A [version](#) of this column first appeared on his [blog](#), Bivocational Ministry, and is used with permission. You can follow him on Twitter [@DennisBickers](#).