SHALOM!
A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION
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Generational Perspectives

AS I WRITE, our Pennsylvania county is in its first week of being in the "yellow phase" of re-opening after almost two months of stay-at-home orders. My husband and I are of the age at highest risk of COVID-19. We have ventured into public places for necessary shopping and to enjoy the out-of-doors, but mostly we've been at home, missing regular in-person contact with family and friends. Apart from the turmoil of the 1960s, which definitely shaped who we are today, we have never experienced anything like this pandemic that has changed the way we live and had such a devastating national and global impact.

We won't live long enough to know the long-term impact of the pandemic, but our children and certainly our grandchildren will. Forty to sixty years from now, how will their grandchildren assess the impact on their parents and grandparents? Will the characteristics of subsequent generations be affected in any way by the 2020 pandemic that is right now so all-consuming?

This edition of *Shalom!* started out as an exploration of how the generations currently living (a few remaining Greatest Generation, Silent, Baby-Boomer, Generation X, Millennial/Gen-Y, and Generation Z) understand each other. I intended to feature representatives of each generation reflecting on national/world events during their lifetimes that shaped them, how they understand themselves and other generations, and what they need or can contribute to the church. Then the pandemic happened.

The result is that we still have representatives from five generations reflecting on their place in history, but some also specifically put their reflections in the context of the pandemic. Obviously, there is much more to be written on the pandemic, and we might return to the topic later when we've had more time to gain some perspective.

It's important to note that generational divisions are somewhat arbitrary. Different writers in this edition assign slightly different years to each generation; sometimes in the literature different names are used, For more analysis of and data about generations, check out these online resources: the Pew Research Center (*pewresearch.org*; search "generations") and the Barna Group (*barna.com/category/millennials-generations/*). For a quick description, see this article: *cnn.com/2013/11/06/us/baby-boomer-generation-fast-facts/index.html*.

Last year, the phrase "OK, boomer" became popular as a way for younger generations to dismiss my generation for being out-of-touch or critical of others. I confess I have resented the attitude implied in the phrase, but I also understand that however much we Baby Boomers might like to think we have made positive contributions, we have also made serious mistakes along the way. Rather than dismiss others easily, however, I hope all generations, no matter their age, can agree with the Psalmist: "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance" (Psalm 16:6).

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

THIS ISSUE OF *SHALOM!*

Intergenerational Ministry

By Christine Embree

IT HAS BEEN more than two months since churches have gathered in person in my state; two months since halls have been walked, sanctuaries have been filled, and Sunday school rooms have been bustling. Over those two months, many of us have heard or even uttered the words, "I miss my church." And by "I miss my church," we really mean we miss the people that belong to our community of faith; very few of us miss a building—we miss each other.

Over this season, it has become apparent that relationships and gathered community are essential to our spiritual walk and faith formation. In her book *Living Into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain Us,* Dr. Christine Pohl reminds us that, "Human beings were made for living in community and it is in community that we flourish and become most fully human."[1] Similarly, Christians were made for living in the community of the church; in that gathered community we flourish and become most fully Christian for Christ is in the midst of those gathered in his name (Matt. 18:20).

Community is something we must work for because barriers to community are swift to arise.[2] These barriers can be detrimental to the creation and maintenance of the type of community that sustains us both physically and spiritually. One such barrier is the "generational gap," which is defined as "the perceived difference of opinions between one generation and another regarding beliefs, politics, or values."[3] This perceived difference has had a deep impact on how our society functions and the structures that have been put in place along generational lines.

Research has found that age is becoming more and more of a dividing line in our culture, but this division has not been good for us. Age homogeneity in social networks leads to isolation and loneliness and greatly inhibits socialization in younger individuals and generativity in older individuals.[4] Even more alarming is that these trends of generational divide and age segregation can be found in the church.[5] The architecture of our buildings, with separate wings and rooms for specific ages; our services divided into traditional, contemporary, and coffee-shop culture; and even our age-specific Sunday school curriculum and Bible studies: these all perpetuate the barrier to community along generational lines. This is particularly worrisome because our faith is primarily dependent on generational discipleship—the passing of the faith from one generation to another. If intergenerational interactions and community are limited because of these structures, how can "one generation commend [God's] works to another" (Ps. 145:4)?

This question has become increasingly significance over the past decade, especially as the representation of rising generations has decreased within the American church.[6] To that point, there has been increased attention given to intergenerational ministry and the opportunity it offers to bridge the generational gap and re-establish a more connected faith community.

What is intergenerational ministry?

Sometimes it is easier to describe what something is by exploring what it is not. Many people associate this term with children's ministry or family ministry. While those ministries may be partners in intergenerational ministry, their scope is not broad enough. Intergenerational ministry encompasses the whole church, all generations, in a communal and corporate context. Intergenerational ministry is more of a cultural characteristic of a church than it is a ministry area; it is a culture that values and creates space for meaningful connections across generational boundaries in a variety of settings for the purpose of generational discipleship, faith formation, and community building. As the term implies, intergenerational ministry is an intentional approach to ministry that allows for and encourages interaction between multiple generations in such ways as corporate worship, relational mentorship, and lifelong community.

In order for a church to recognize the need for this generational connectivity within their faith community, the following question must be answered: What does each generation need from the church and what can each generation contribute to the church? Let's begin with the latter and then explore the former.

Generational theory—the grouping of individuals into particular social groups with a shared identity based on the year of their birth and life experiences—began in the early twentieth century and gained steam in the mid-to-late twentieth century as marketing firms began to explore how to market to specific groups, coining nicknames for them in order to create a collective conscious.[7] Currently, the most likely generations that would be found in a given faith community

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would be the Silent Generation (born 1924-1942), Baby Boomers (1943-1964), Gen-X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-2000), and Gen-Z (2001-current). These five generations offer unique experiences in both spiritual and communal practices for the church. The older generations bring a wealth of faithful testimonies, historical worship practices, and community-sustaining disciplines. The middle generations connect the past to the present through experience with a vast array of communication tools, from rotary phones to high-speed internet conferencing and the latest social media trends. The youngest generation offers the heartbeat of current culture and the application of spiritual truths in a dynamic cultural environment.

Likewise, each generation brings its unique needs to the church. Older generations need generativity and the ability to leave a legacy; feeling isolated from those to whom their legacy will be left is stifling and leads to stagnation. Middle generations seek intimacy in deeper relationships with others, such as mentorship and discipleship; if those opportunities are not there, they will retreat into isolation. The youngest generations are looking for a place to be industrious and find identity; thus faith communities need to be intentional not just with providing safe and fun environments like Kid's Church and youth group, but integral participatory environments that allow for identity and industry to be rooted in the church.

Recently, I have been offered the opportunity to serve as the minister of generational discipleship for the Great Lakes Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church U. S. The goal of this position is to offer support, encouragement, and resources to congregations that will help connect generations in meaningful relationships and discipleship. There is no cookie-cutter approach to intergenerational ministry. Each congregation has its own unique needs and desires that must be addressed in order to create the space needed for relational discipleship to grow. But the need for these intergenerational connections has never been more apparent, and the opportunities have never been more plentiful than they are today.

Endnotes

[1]C. Poh, *Living Into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 3.

[2]Pohl, 4.

[3]M. Aggarwal, M. Rawat, S. Singh, S. Srivastava,and P. Gaub, "Generation Gap: An Emerging Issue of Society,." *International Journal of Engineering Technology Science and Research,* 4 (September 2017): 973-983.

[4]G. Hagestad. and P. Uhlenberg, "Should We Be Concerned About Age Segregation?: Some Theoretical and Empirical Explorations," *Research on Aging,* 28 (November 1, 2006): 638- 653.

[5]C. Stonehouse and S. May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010).

[6]"In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019,

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A Long, Long Story

By Zach Spidel

GOD'S GREATEST WORKS all seem to take time—often more time than we would like. Jesus taught his disciples for three years, but after all that time they did not fully "get it." Even after following and learning, it would take the resurrection on Easter and the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost for the teaching of Jesus to finally and fully click with Peter, on whose lips the gospel flowered that first Pentecost in a sermon that was powered by the Spirit and informed, at last, by a true grasp of his Master's message.

One might also think of Israel's return from captivity in Babylon. Seventy years went by, Jerusalem and the Temple a heap of ruins the whole time, before the grandchildren of the original exiles finally came home and began to rebuild. Or think again of the many generations who lived in slavery in Egypt, praying and waiting and not seeing, in their own day, the deliverance of God, but holding onto hope nonetheless (even if it was only the hope of the desperate) and crying out to God for help. God heard their cries and after many had lived and died in that land, he came in power to free them.

That generation of God's people—the one that was so remarkably delivered—would not, however, be the generation that entered the promised land. Slavery had done its insidious work in their hearts and they frequently expressed a fear of the future and a desire to return to the oppression they had known rather than face the uncertainties of a free future. Overcome by their fear on the cusp of entry into the promised land, that generation rebelled. They fled the task God set them, and God determined to have them live out the remainder of their days in the desert. This was not punishment, I think, but pedagogy. He was teaching fearful hearts to trust, teaching this generation how to depend on God, and teaching their children, from the start, that he was a God who could provide manna in the desert, guidance in the wasteland, and protection from the foe. When all but two members of that earlier generation had passed away, God led the younger generation into the promised land. God did not love the later generation more, nor were they a better people; their own struggles and failings are recorded in Scripture as well! But to each of these generations a task was given; each had its own part to play in the much longer story of God's re-

demption, as every generation does.

This is how I think of my own generation, and those of my parents and grandparents and that of my nine-month old daughter. My story is one small part of the story of a generation, and our story is one small part of a much longer story, reaching back in time until all human memory falters and reaching forward in time until that day when Christ will come again. There are wounds and sins and injustices in our time that I pray God will address. Perhaps I will live to see this, or perhaps mine will be a generation like those in Egypt that cried out in prayer and so passed on a living hope for a future time. Perhaps mine will be like the generation of Joshua and Caleb, and we will welcome and contribute to some great deliverance, even if we're not quite able to fully grasp it. If so, then my children and my children's children will tell our stories even as they work to complete what we can only begin. Perhaps, mine will be most like the generation that entered the promised land and finally came to receive what had been long promised.

I know I do in fact depend on great works of deliverance which God has rendered in the recent past. I know what mighty works of salvation God has wrought in the thundering rhetoric of Martin Luther King Jr., in the warm intensity of Billy Graham's crusades, in the quiet counter-cultural witness of Brethren at their love feasts, and in the pastors and Sunday School teachers and Bible quiz coaches and youth leaders who all played their part in my own personal salvation story.

I'm not sure which generation mine is most like; it is no doubt a bit like all of these. The uncertainty, I think, is important. No story's true significance can be known until it is fully told. So it is with my own story and so it is with the story of a generation. A generation may judge itself a failure but be remembered later on as faithful in difficulties beyond its control. Likewise, a generation may judge itself accomplished, only to lead the world to the brink of cataclysm. I think of the almost-utopian perspective present at the dawn of the twentieth century, of a generation with a faith in the inevitability of "progress." Yet that misplaced faith, and the grandiose promises made on its basis, was crushed by the convulsions of war in the teens, decadence in the twenties, and depression in the thirties. These examples ought to caution us against attempting, prematurely, to tell the story of our own generation, to laud or blame it. What stories we tell, we must tell provisionally and humbly and with the knowledge that we see very little of the grand pattern and can write only a single page in the much longer saga of salvation we're all living.

What we can do, in each and every generation, is strive to grasp hold of that which persists and has value in every age. We can strive to love God and love our neighbor, to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our Lord. What forms such a walk must take, what roads such walking must lead us down, will differ significantly generation from generation. But what all Christians share, and have shared for the last two thousand years, can be found in Christ, who calls forth each generation in its own day to take its own unique role in the long, long story of salvation.

Zach Spidel *is pastor of The Shepherd's Table, Dayton, OH.*

Experiencing the Brethren in Christ as an "Xennial'

By Drew Strayer

BORN IN 1977, I am a part of the "Xennial" micro-generation of those born at the end of Generation X and the beginning of the Millennials. We arrived on the cusp of incredible change. This was just before home computers became common, the 24-hour news cycle accelerated the speed of daily life of dominant U. S. culture, and the internet was zooming at the speed of . . . dial-up?!?

For our Boomer parents, the morning paper, the evening TV news, and a magazine or two offered the information they needed. The Millennials after us never knew life before the instant info of Google searches. Those of us who are Gen-X and Xennial bridged that transition and now, in our 40s, we "need" instantaneous access to a smartphone or smartwatch to "view content" on at least three different social media feeds.

Another major shift from our Boomer parents and early Gen-X cousins to our Xennial cohort was the common experience that if you "put in the time," you would one day get your chance to lead and share in decision-making. The Millennials after us never seemed to have much tolerance for the waiting, and Boomers often gave them early opportunities to engage since Boomers realized there was much to gain from Millennials' divergent/fresh perspectives. The power differential seemed safe; they were not professional competitors at that point. Further, healthy, active Boomers have been leading for 40+ years! Nearly our whole lives, we have observed Boomer leadership!

All of this paints a picture of how our generation often feels in-between, "neither this nor that." We aren't old-school, but neither are we always the newest of everything. We hold to some historic traditions, but there are some new ways of thinking we would not consider ignoring. We are a bridge. We offer the potential to hold divergent groups together. Many times, I see others in my cohort drawing different generations and perspectives together, because it is what we have had to do our whole lives. The goal is not to change everyone's perspective to match completely, but to welcome all to the table to join together in their uniqueness. In shared space, knowing and being known can co-exist with the vibrant tension of unity without conformity.

I was raised in the Brethren in Christ Church from age five till my late teens. During those early years I sensed, more than knew empirically, that Brethren in Christ leaders were humble, intentional, prayerful, peaceful, authentic, and present. They worshipped God and preached the Word. Christ was the example and lens for the whole Bible. The Holy Spirit was present and active. In those years, I recall a vague sense

that there were some who were present, committed, and welcomed, but not always on precisely the same page. I remember sensing that there were some strong differences of opinion, but faithful fellowship held the families together.

About 10 years ago, after a decade living in areas with no Brethren in Christ churches, I sensed a clear call to full-time pastoral ministry. I realized there were things I could not affirm in the theology and ecclesiology of most denominations. With practical experience and research, I realized that the only denominational core values and ecclesiology I could unequivocally support were those of the Brethren in Christ. Glad to find my people and a place I could serve, I rejoined the denomination as a staff pastor where I quickly realized there was more variety of perspectives than I perceived in my younger years. I found that some argued against some of the core values of the faith family I had just rediscovered! I wondered if this would be another experience of being "neither this nor that."

What has become clear for me is that some in my bridging Xennial cohort hold stronger ties to the core values than some who are older or younger and newer to the church. Something in the our open-armed welcome is both vital and painful. It is a tension, a vulnerability, much like I'm sure Jesus experienced with his band of dissimilar disciples. Among the 12, there were fishermen with limited formal education, a tax collector aiding and abetting Roman occupiers, rebel zealot brothers, and others. Dissimilar women and men were drawn to the Rabbi Jesus, and this group of dissimilar disciples grew to more than 72. Yet they held together in their community of faith. Differences were bridged. Jesus was the center.

This example is important for the Brethren in Christ. People who don't fully commit to the peace position or any other need not leave, but we dare not lose our distinctives. We bridge difference because we value our commitment as a community of faith. We continue to wrestle in our spirits with things that challenge us, to know and be known as bridging differences. And we remember that just because we see things differently does not mean we change denominational statements into our image.

So why do so many people join and stay in the Brethren in Christ who are neither this nor that? Maybe that is part of how an Xennial like me, and so many others of so many generations and perspectives, simply belong!

Drew and Millyellen Strayer *are co-pastoring the germination of a church plant in Salem, Oregon called Peace City Church. You can reach them at peacecitychurchBIC@gmail.com.*

How an October Crisis Impacted Me

By Martha Lockwood

I GREW UP in a family that was always knowledgeable about current events and would watch the nightly news together. Born in 1961, I witnessed the world from my safe, small town, middle class home in Southern Ontario, Canada. My parents did not shield me from world events, be they good or bad, just or unjust, redemptive or evil. Instead, they welcomed questions and discussion about what I had just watched on TV. As a result I had a well-formed political opinion by the time I was eight years old.

In 1970, the country known for hockey, peace, and good manners experienced—for the first time in my young life—domestic acts of terrorism. Most were in the Montreal area of Quebec, our neighbouring province. From 1963-1970, the Front de liberation du Quebec (FLQ) detonated over 950 bombs. Most of these bombs were in the mailboxes of affluent anglophone homes, but on February 13, 1969, a bomb exploded at the Montreal Stock Exchange causing significant damage and injuring 27 people. Canada was beginning to lose its innocence.

The Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, represented all the FLQ hated. He was born into an affluent family, both francophone on his father's side and anglophone (Scottish) on his mother's side. He was progressive, and had a strong vision of Canadian federalism that did not waver in spite of being born in Montreal.

All of the unrest in Quebec came to a head in October 1970. British diplomat James Cross and Quebec Provincial Cabinet Minister Pierre Laporte were both kidnapped by the FLQ. In response, Prime Minister Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act (similar to Martial Law in the U.S.). This strategy to stop further kidnappings was supported by Montreal's Mayor Jean Drapeau, and Quebec's Premier Robert Bourassa. Peace officers could detain and question people without cause. They stood guard in full combat gear on the streets of Montreal. This offended some of those who did not like to see armed soldiers on Canadian streets.

The War Measures Act and its regulations were lifted in November. Sadly, Pierre Laporte had been murdered and his body found in the trunk of a car, but James Cross was found alive and rescued. Many of those responsible were arrested, tried, and convicted for their crimes.

While some Canadians believed Prime Minister Trudeau went too far to restore peace to Canadian streets, that was not our family's opinion. As we watched the evening news and saw the "bad guys were being caught and put in jail," I felt calm and protected.

As a child it became part of my belief system that the government was good and trustworthy. I had confidence that I would be protected and cared for when there was trouble. This ideal extended to the police, judges, and local authorities. I was proud to be Canadian and thankful that when things were unstable, my government would take action to protect its' citizens.

For the most part I still believe this. It is difficult to reconcile this view with the Anabaptist opposition to violence that I later came to embrace, but in this case I think the government's action prevented further violence.

Martha Lockwood *served as a Brethren in Christ pastor for 21 years, and now is a pastor in the United Church of Canada.*

Perspectives from Five Generations

EDITOR'S NOTE: I sent out invitations to people representing the generations, asking them to reflect on a life-altering event that happened when they were young and how it affected them, keeping in mind the current global pandemic that may change life as we know it. Below are excerpts from the responses I received.

The Silent Generation (1928-1945)

I was born in 1927 on a farm, the last of nine children. The Great Depression hit in 1929, so I grew up hearing that we could not afford many things. Christmas was lean but the box of candy and an orange at church were exciting. We were sustained with a big garden, our own supply of meat, milk, eggs, and even fruit trees. Many big families ate lots of corn meal mush for supper and fried the left-overs for breakfast.

We were learning survival skills, making the most of what we had, making it stretch, and even sharing with the less fortunate. These carried over into later life. Making ends meet was difficult for newlyweds. or anyone without a financial reserve.

As the country was lifting its head from the Depression, World War II broke out and America was sucked in. Essentials like gas and sugar were rationed. Then as now, cooks became creative in using up anything they found in their pantry. Conscription for military service made many young men think seriously about what they really felt about taking life. Fortunately, the government allowed a place for conscientious objectors and noncombatant service.

Mim Stern, Philadelphia, PA

When I was born in 1932, my family was experiencing the Great Depression. My mother peddled bouquets of flowers door to door in the city of Dayton, Ohio to help make ends meet while she was pregnant with me. I was not aware of any suffering but felt well cared for. What I did notice over the years was my parents' extreme desire to save everything. This was more than a simple lifestyle but resulted in the accumulation of many things that "might be needed some day." Along with this was a careful use of resources and finances, a commendable habit that was no doubt deepened by the Depression. The practice of saving continued their entire lives, and I picked up the habit until I left home and was constantly on the move as a missionary. In this role, we found the careful use of resources very helpful as we stretched the missionary allowance to meet our needs.

World War II during my teen years did not change the saving habit. I remember well the rationing of sugar and gasoline. The "war effort" brought a seriousness to life that was new to me. The one blackout practice that we participated in (in case we were bombed) was traumatic as I failed to see a partly glass door that was shut and plunged my head through it. I still have the scar, though it's hidden by hair. Seeing young men from our congregation serve in conscientious objector camps and postpone their weddings gave me an appreciation for obeying convictions that were costly.

Grace Holland, Dillsburg, PA

September 1, 1939 was a beautiful summer morning in Nappanee, Indiana, when the news came of Germany's invasion of Poland. I knew the action was not good and was thinking about the implications for my Dad. We had survived the Great Depression, had a weekly income of $25.00, and had moved into a recently purchased house. Would they start drafting men? Would our family of three children be broken up? We knew war was wrong, but how would our future appear?

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941, we heard the shocking reports of the expanding war. Earlier my Dad had registered as a conscientious objector and received deferment as a minister with family. The next summer Dad was asked to open a bookstore in Elizabethtown, PA (later part of the Christian Light Bookstore chain.) As a minister, he was assigned to the Conoy Church to assist Abner Martin when he was away on revival meetings. I traveled with him when he went to minister in locations where conscientious objectors were assigned to do alternate service. As a minister, Dad got extra gas rationing points so he could do this travel.

This all had a profound effect on me. We practiced air raids, and endured sugar, food, clothing, and gas rationing. School children gathered metal scraps from wooded dumps for recycling. War Bonds were widely promoted to help fund the war. Other countries' resources were depleted and the U.S. had to contribute more. Personal freedoms were restricted, there was widespread rationing, and people lived in anxiety and fear. Then the government knew the "enemy," but was not prepared. Now, we are still trying to understand the nature of the enemy (the coronavirus), and we're still preparing.

David McBeth, Mechanicsburg, PA

*The **Baby Boomer** generation (1946-1964) is represented in Ken Abell's article on page 8.*

Generation X (1965-1980)

During this current time of staying in place, I worry about the emotional highs and lows out family has. Is my son, the extroverted only child who has won a best friend award twice in his short life, going to survive just being with just his boring mom and dad? Is he, like the memes say he should, going to remember this as great family time? Many days, I think the only lesson that might stick is that when Mom really doesn't want to be bothered, she gives out YouTube minutes. I worry about creating undue worry in a time of uncertainty. How can I create safety when I have no more information on what is to come?

But then I remember sitting in a third grade classroom, where we had gathered to watch the space shuttle launch. I was especially excited because Christa McAuliffe, a teacher, was on board. My teacher, Mrs. Parish, had applied to be that teacher on board, and so my class felt an additional connection to the launch.

When the Challenger burst into flames, I immediately looked at Mrs. Parish. She was standing besides our little chairs, tears

streaming down her cheeks. I knew it was okay to be upset. Later, Mrs. Parish shared in manageable amounts her feelings, and I remember at one point bursting into tears because we could have lost Mrs. Parish on that flight.

The lesson? As a leader, don't hide your emotions during crisis. My teacher was able to lead us through a very hard day. She didn't hide that she was sad, and she was still there for us. She showed us her tears to allow ours.

Krista Dutt, Chicago, IL

Millennials/Generation Y (1981-1996)

The most influential "event" to happen to my generation was the introduction of social media and smartphones. Having the ability to constantly connect with other people through a portable device shaped our generation in a fundamental way.

As a college freshman, I heard about this thing called Facebook for college kids to stay connected. I signed up immediately. In the beginning, it wasn't a big thing in my life, but soon it became part of everyday life. "I've got to take a picture to post to Facebook" eventually became the cultural thought of my generation. We got sucked into the mentality that unless we posted something on our social media platforms, it didn't count.

Then I got a smartphone. I could take a picture on my phone and post it immediately to my social media platform. I could continually check my phone to see if anyone cared about my picture. When we put social media in our pockets, along with constant connection to others to seek approval from the masses, we rewired our brains to become dependent and obsessive.

Almost 10 years after my introduction to Facebook, I decided to take a 30-day break from all forms of social media. It was challenging at first, but then provided a true paradigm shift for me. I've been back on social media for awhile now. The idea that the number of followers you have is directly related to your self-worth is sadly a reality for many. For my generation and the one after me, not being able to connect with people in person right now due to COVID-19, exaggerates the comparison game because we don't get to see the authentic people behind the pictures. This struggle to know how to balance the unbelievable benefits of a smartphone and the unhealthy mental struggles it takes on us is real.

Kara McKinney, Grantham, PA

Generation Z (1997-2013)

Two events stand out as significant for me as a 17-year-old high school junior. The global pandemic of COVID-19 stopped school and ended all extra-curricular activities with other people. But while it has changed my daily life completely, I don't know if it's something I will remember 50 years from now or will tell my grandchildren about. The second event was the 2016 presidential election. When I went to school the day after Election Day, one of my friends was crying because he was afraid that his mother would be deported because she is undocumented. Lots of my friends are worried about this administration's immigration policies.

Alecia Espinosa, Philadelphia, PA

EDITOR'S NOTE #2: I also asked what they think are the primary characteristics of their generation, how they feel their generation is misunderstood, and what they need from and can contribute to the church. Here are a few excerpts from their responses.

Kara McKinney: We are the ones who are always on our phones and want to do things in a more flexible and creative way. We have contributed innovation and creativity in new and exciting ways that help us make things better and work more efficiently. We look at how things were done in the past as a resource, but do not feel like we have to use it as a prescription for the way to solve our problems.

I went through a phase where I didn't want anything to do with church, and then I wanted the easy entertainment-style church. When I started looking for a church where I could put down roots, I wanted a liturgical style that was rooted in the Ancient Church and gave me room to question. I've found that in my home congregation (Grantham Brethren in Christ).

Krista Dutt: One of the ways I am a GenXeres is that I was a latch-key kid, which helped me develop a sense of independence I don't see in other generations. I still like that time after work to be just me even though I am an extrovert.

We have a lot to give the church in terms of steady movement ahead and yet the ability to rest when needed. We understand that we aren't going to succeed just because we try, but we have hope that we can get there.

Grace Holland: I would like younger generations to understand that our generation's love for the church is a God-given conviction and blessing. I would like younger generations to love the church with me, faults and all. We are part of the body of Christ and share this tremendous privilege.

Mim Stern: Young people listening to seniors' stories can gain a richer perspective on life. My students laugh if they find something in my larder with an expired date which was unheard of when I grew up and was a missionary. I find the young are seeing the practicality of thrift stores. And I cannot thank the younger generation enough for helping/teaching me as I struggle with technology!

Alecia Espinosa: Older people think we're addicted to technology, but we learn from it. For example, I've learned how to do many creative things just by looking up a YouTube video. On the other hand, social media can make us very self-conscious and constantly compare ourselves to others, like whether we're wearing the right thing.

We need support from the church. We have family, but we need other people for discipleship too. We want our point of view on issues that come up in church to be taken seriously, whether with voting privileges or specific opportunities to speak and give input. We can contribute our skills with technology and help organize events, like church-wide retreats.

David McBeth: I relied heavily on the Bible; it was truth to be taken seriously and applied to everyday life. Today, it seems like young people rely on the internet to find out what the Bible says, instead of going to the Bible as the primary source. Not all interpretations are equal, and we need to read the Bible itself and be discerning, within the church community, about how to apply it to our lives.

The Sixties Revisited

By Ken R. Abell

"Don't worry, Mr. Presidents help's on the way/Your brothers are coming, there'll be hell to pay. . ." ~Bob Dylan~

IN HIS LATEST release, Dylan's *Murder Most Foul* chronicles the assassination of John F. Kennedy. I was eight years old when those momentous days in Dallas became the focal point of the world, watching the news coverage with my parents and siblings; likely the seedling beginnings of me becoming a sometimes-obsessive news junkie.

As a paperboy during the decade that became infamous as The Sixties, I routinely read headline stories while delivering the *Welland Tribune* door to door, which meant that learning about high-profile slayings became almost commonplace: November 22, 1963—John F. Kennedy, February 1, 1965—George Lincoln Rockwell, August 25, 1965—Malcom X, April 4, 1968—Martin Luther King Jr., June 6, 1968—Robert F. Kennedy.

A war in a faraway place called Vietnam invaded living rooms across the country via grainy television news coverage. The conflict became the contentious catalyst for a generational divide that drove wedges between fathers and sons, which put stress on many families and caused divisive repercussions that still have the capacity to echo.

The Sixties were a polarizing paradox—love, peace, and the idealism of flower power alongside civil unrest and anti-war protests that time and again descended into violence. All of this was chronicled by the poetry of singer-songwriters like Dylan; for Boomers, the social commentary of those songs was the profound soundtrack of our lives.

Somewhere along the way a tension took root. The nightly news gave us ample evidence of bickering and duplicity, but nevertheless we became enthusiastic watchers of politicians and government. We hoped that the better angels of our nature would rise from the maelstrom of campaign bickering to carry our banner of idealism.

The presidency of Richard M. Nixon quashed such high-minded hopes, perhaps because it coincided with the advent of an aggressive cadre of baby-boom journalists who didn't look the other way or play by established rules. In Nixon's self-inflicted fall from grace due to a third-rate burglary that went extraordinarily wrong, we understood that the poet's words had prophetic repercussions: "But even the president of the United States sometimes must have to stand naked." History is what it is—the challenge is to interpret and attempt to learn lessons. Sounds simple enough, but it's often as elusive as capturing handfuls of smoke in the wind. Events happened, which we filter through lenses created in the time and place of our upbringing, influenced by respected teachers and elders. Each generation, either intentionally or inadvertently, passes the torch of yesteryear forward.

We see similarities between past and present events—we watch helplessly as decisions are made in the name of patriotism or national pride which repeat patterns that led to war in the past. History has a proclivity for repetition: how can understanding that aspect of our story guide the way we inevitably move from one generation to another?

How do we come to terms with the wisdom of Solomon? What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. My maternal grandmother, an oral historian extraordinaire who told endless stories while snapping peas, would refer to such a declaration as a quandary or quagmire.

Was Solomon's point of view cynical or gut-honest realism? Likely a healthy mixture of both, which ought to be our objective, but the tension between them is a tug of war requiring intentional thinking and heeding. The problem with gut-honest realism is that left unchecked it can easily mutate into the chronic cynicism of a sourpuss.

For golden-agers, listening to teens and 20-somethings should be a healthy exercise in understanding. Grandchildren can be quite insightful and no-nonsense in their observations and comments. Papa, if the news upsets you, why do you watch it? A good question asked by a then eight-year-old grandson, for which I did not have an answer.

Of course he was correct. For a short while I heeded his wisdom, but being a certifiable news junkie, I soon relapsed. However, I took his query to heart and have significantly reduced consumption of news and increased bird watching, which is much more relaxing and conducive to positive reflections and creative endeavors.

Every generation has its upheavals and disappointments that discolors perspective and outlook. The challenge is to intentionally make efforts to learn from each other—to engage in discussions that accept and respect differences while striving to see underlying connecting points. After all, regardless of whether our viewpoints are polar opposite, according to the Apostle Paul in Romans, we have a God-given responsibility that cannot be ignored: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

What can Boomers learn from younger generations and vice versa? A great deal if we genuinely seek to hear each other while standing on the ground of our common humanity. However, if we choose the us-versus-them model prevalent in our culture, in the phrasing of the poet, the answer my friends, will likely be blowin' in the wind.

Ken Abell *is a former Brethren in Christ pastor and now serves as a counselor and home living coordinator at BIC Overcomers, Bloomfield, NM.*

Pandemic Lessons from My 90-Year-Old Grandmother

By Micah Brickner

I SAT QUIETLY at a row of long rectangular tables. My wife, Heather, and my two-year-old son Lucas sat to my left, with my sister, brother-in-law, and nephew adjacent to us. Country renditions of familiar hymns flowed from an inconspicuous speaker in the corner of the fellowship hall of a small, rural Lutheran church. Just two tables over from where I was sitting, a spread of cold cuts and finger food lined another long table. As I processed every smell, sound, and the overall vibe of the room, I realized how much this event felt like a funeral.

However, it wasn't a memorial service—at least not in the sense of remembering the deceased. In fact, it was the 90th birthday party for my grandmother, Verna O. Hepler (née Moyer). Little did I realize that within the month following that celebration, I would be writing the reflections I could have written for the party.

My mother had asked me to prepare some remarks for my grandmother, but I couldn't find the right words. Every time I pondered what I might write, it felt too much like a eulogy. The reality is, I couldn't have written these reflections at that time, because I hadn't fully discovered my creative inspiration: a pandemic.

On that sunny Sunday afternoon in early March, COVID-19 had only just begun to be observably spread through community transmission. I was concerned about how the disease might run its course, but mostly able to convince myself that my anxieties were extreme. Within the following weeks, it became apparent that my fears weren't unfounded—a horrific pandemic began to have widespread impact on all populations.

It all felt relatively distant at first, but slowly it became more tangible. First, my son's daycare closed, making my wife and me struggle to resolve childcare. Then, non-essential businesses began to close, Heather and I both working from home with our toddler. Stay-at-home orders drew closer and closer, until finally, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, was closed. Shortly afterward, the rest of the state and most of the nation had closed. My family, along with millions of other families around the country, found ourselves in an alternate reality.

While I still had my job, I found myself washing Ziploc bags to reuse them, putting gently used parchment paper sheets back in the drawer, bleaching and rinsing foam egg cartons, and saving cuttings of potatoes with "eyes" for the purpose of planting them. I even ventured into the yard to clip dandelion greens for a salad. I realized I was behaving strangely, but mostly chalked it up to obsessive-compulsive disorder.

It all started to make sense to me when my sister sent me a text message about something she read on social media; "Does anyone else have grandparents who do weird stuff that was explained by the fact that they lived through the Great Depression? We're going to be those grandparents: 'Daddy, why is grandma Clorox-wiping the grocery bags?' 'She lived through COVID-19, honey. She doesn't talk about it.'"

It was surreal how true this meme was. My grandmother was known to collect a lot of recyclable items, which we usually explained with the logic of: "She lived through the Great Depression." I then realized that everything we had observed in our grandmother might actually be lessons we need right now.

Simplicity

Born in 1930, my grandmother entered the world just months after the stock markets had crashed. Having been raised in a large dairy-farming family in rural Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, my grandmother learned the practice of simple living as a compulsory reality. The oldest of her siblings, Verna reached the eighth grade and was forced to leave school like many other children, in order to help with the family farm.

Later, working as a seamstress in a textile factory, mostly providing the sole income for her four children, she knew how to stretch a dollar. As a child, my cousins and I were quick to question our grandmother's seemingly odd behavior. We grimaced at the thought of eating dandelion greens with hot bacon dressing. Baffled by the piles of reused pudding cups, we sadly wrote off much of Verna's frugality as unnecessary.

My grandmother was simply ahead of her time. She was "green" before it was hip. Now, I look back at my grandmother's pursuit of simple living and say, "What an inspiration." She actually showed me how to reduce and reuse things in ways that have helped to prepare me for a time like this.

Creativity

As a young child, I had a love-hate relationship with trips to my grandmother's house. My sister and I would stay with her for a week or two in the summer and occasionally some extended time over a winter break from school. Staying with my grandmother kind of felt like going back in time, and connection with the outside world was essentially nonexistent.

Sometimes, this isolation felt overwhelming. While we loved our grandmother, we longed for things to do. My sister and I were generally pretty creative children who didn't rely solely on television, video games, or the internet to pass the time. However, the thought of having no access to those things felt very lonely.

We hoped that our cousins would come to visit so we had people to play with outside. My sister and I would wait for the sound of a car coming down the lane. However, in my boredom and loneliness, I developed a love for nature that I hold to this day. Sometimes, I would spend hours outside playing in the woods, fields, hills, creek, or coal dirt on the property. My grandmother never extensively programmed our time with her. She would have some special things lined up for us, but generally, she let us play while she tended after the house or prepared a meal.

The environment she fostered for us instilled a great level of creativity in me. Verna taught us how to bake banana cookies, harvest walnuts from the yard, pick meadow tea from the creek bed, and much more. Now as an adult, living in the midst of this pan-

demic, I find myself replicating much of the creative spirit I felt as a child visiting my grandmother. I'm baking bread, digging holes in my yard to landscape, and picking flowers with my son.

Perseverance

My grandmother is one of the most resilient people I know. Not only was she born during the Great Depression, but she endured a great deal of hardship throughout her life. When she was a teenager, Verna's father ran away with another woman, leaving her to help raise her younger brothers. Several years later, she took the nearly unheard-of step of divorcing an abusive husband and moving back in with her mother to raise her firstborn child. Years later, she married my grandfather and gave birth to three more children. Shortly after the birth of their third child, my grandfather became ill with an aggressive form of cancer, which took his life at a young age. Verna was left raising four children with only the help of her mother-in-law. Working tirelessly in a dying industry in the heart of Pennsylvania coal country, she eventually received her G.E.D. and an associate's degree, five decades after she had to drop out of school.

In the midst of all this, Verna has remained steadfast in her faith. She pursued a faith that was spirit-filled, believing that God was very much present in her life. To this day, she continues to diligently attend the Lutheran parish up the road from her house, and she espouses a very vibrant personal faith.

My grandmother has exemplified the words of Paul to Timothy: "So, my child, draw your strength from the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Take the things you heard me say in front of many other witnesses and pass them on to faithful people who are also capable of teaching others" (2 Tim. 2:1–2, CEB).

This is a challenge for me, as I know I need to keep putting my faith in front of me. My grandmother has taught me—with both spoken word and humble action—how to persevere with faith in the midst of great challenges. As I look at the current world in which we live, I think we could all learn from the perseverance of Verna.

Micah Brickner *is communications director at Eastern Mennonite Missions, and attends Branch and Vine (a BIC church plant), Lancaster, PA.*

Humility as a Bridge to Generational Understanding

By Theresa Grosh

PERHAPS YOU ARE experiencing the joys and frustrations of life in close quarters during these times of social isolation. My family is one among many who are living daily under one roof. We are a family of six (mom, dad, four daughters). At the time of the governor's announcement closing schools and businesses, one daughter was away at college and another was still home on her spring break. A few days later we brought our daughter home from college, thus indefinitely reuniting our entire family.

As my collegiate daughters encountered peers with life experiences very different from their own, I enjoyed our conversations about their observations. Watching my daughters begin to live out their own convictions has been enlightening. They are now "emerging adults"—a fascinating and exciting time of life. I am reminded daily that the influences and life experiences that shape their beliefs, motivations, and actions are different than those that influenced me at that same stage of life. Therein lies the crux of how generations are defined.

Generational cohorts share not only a range of birth years but also an identity that has been forged by current events, technology, and reaction to older and younger cohorts. While helpful when speaking in generalities, generational characteristics certainly have their limits. Personal experience and even personalities are also exceptionally significant in identity formation. In the unique times in which we find ourselves—perhaps with multiple generations living under one roof with little opportunity for separation—you may find yourself bumping up against generational conflict. Shouting, door slamming, and venting on Facebook may provide a temporary emotional release, but I challenge us to consider an alternative posture—a posture of humility as a bridge to generational understanding.

For this article, I surveyed a massive sample of six individuals across three generations: my mom and dad (born in late 1945) who consider themselves early Baby Boomers with sympathies toward the Silent Generation, my sister and me (born in 1969 and 1974, respectively) who fall firmly in the Gen-X designation, and my twin daughters (born in 2000) who are part of Gen-Z.

I began my survey with the question, "What do you consider the defining historical event(s) of your generation?" Not surprisingly, both of my parents responded with the Vietnam conflict, the cultural revolution led by the hippie movement, and the civil rights movement. These are all arguably particularly violent events, and television was the medium that streamed images into the collective households of this era which also included high-profile assassinations (John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X) and bloody political protests.

My sister and I struggled a bit more to identify a key event that shaped our generation. Instead, we were influenced more by the ethos of the Reagan era. There was an American optimism oddly tempered by fear from the threats of the Cold War. As a child I was acutely fearful of nuclear war and even wrote a letter to President Reagan expressing my thoughts. I think it could be argued, however, that Gen-X did not experience the level of violence in America as did the Baby Boomers.

Not having any Millennials in my sample, I will skip to Gen-Z. When I posed the question to my daughters, they both agreed in their responses. They cited the developments in technology, specifically the evolution of the iPhone, to be the factor with the most impact on their generation. I find it fascinating that the most influential events, over these three generations, have moved from

multiple deadly conflicts, to relative peace with undercurrents of total annihilation, to technological advances. Considering how the experiences we live through shape our views of the world, it's easy to see why conflicts between the generations can occur!

Conflict is inevitable. Conflict divides and separates. It leads to anger and hatred, which we certainly observe in our culture today. But conflict with a posture of humility can spur us to examine our convictions which may even lead to necessary and helpful change. Encountering copious amounts of conflict on social media has convicted me to change my kneejerk reaction from exasperation to empathy. Humility is difficult. It doesn't always feel as satisfying. But when I ask questions about why an individual feels so strongly about their beliefs, it builds a bridge to understanding. Conflict resolution cannot happen without humility. It goes against our sinful human nature that wants to put ourselves first. But "self-firstness" is not the way of Christ: "Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13), or "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12: 31).

If you are living in a home with generational conflict, embrace humility. Ask questions. Remember that the experiences that shaped you are not the same experiences that shaped another generation. You may be appalled at the amount of time your daughter spends on her device. You may view this habit as a total waste of time. You survived your teenage or young adult years without a cell phone, social media, Google, or YouTube. Why can't she?? Did you ask her to help you to understand what she is doing? Perhaps she is feeling untethered since she was sent home from her collegiate support community. Perhaps she is fearful of not going back to her "home away from home" in the fall. Will she graduate on time? Will she miss out on the much-anticipated key internship? Through her device she can remain connected to her support network of friends and professors. Yes, even these are "real" relationships.

Gen-Z, do you roll your eyes at forced family dinners or game nights? Did you ask your Gen-X parents why they bother? Did they tell you that they are the "latch key" generation? They came home from school to empty houses because their parents were working hard to provide the American Dream for them. They had houses filled with beautiful and plentiful things but lacked relationships. Their biggest fear is that they will perpetuate those skewed values.

Taking time to ask questions, with a posture of humility and a goal of empathy, will put our feet on the path towards generational reconciliation and understanding.

Theresa Grosh *and her family attend Elizabethtown (PA) Brethren in Christ Church, where she serves on church board and with the ESL and children's programs. She blogs at naptimeinspirations.com/blog.*

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I have sought out their knowledge, and have been able to turn long-lasting relationships into valuable ministries in the church.

From the wisdom of my 23-year-old twins, I have learned that those in Generation Z (1996 to today) tend to be entrepreneurial and private, yet their "best lives" are often on display. They often pursue things that are expedient, with seemingly less interest in things that season over time. What they bring to the church is relevancy. They are connected and they are listening to the latest media. Let's introduce them to the practicality of Christianity and how it is applicable to their lives. In turn, they bring relevancy, helping the church better address the social justice issues of today. My sons are concerned that this is the generation the church is at risk of losing. Not only do we need their relevancy, but they need us to learn to relate in their world. Also, let's not forget the little children of this generation who bring energy and contagious vitality through the door. They need the church to be a family in which they can thrive.

Without this generational perspective, it is easy to see how we often collide. Enter Jesus, the sage guide we follow. Through him, we come to value the importance of the journey where we learn to mingle well. It doesn't matter whether we come to know him as adults or as children. We all start at the beginning. The moment we turn and face him, our journey begins. We learn that Jesus has room for us—for our mistakes—always moving us closer to the Father. We can give each other the space, flexibility, and grace to make mistakes because through the journey we gain the wisdom that enables us to be together in our differences. To reach people and meet them where they are, we must first understand them. Let's listen and engage in conversations; let's leave room for personality differences; let's be willing to step across the generations and share with one another. We can speak the common language of grace and respect, and journey down the road of faith through the messy mingling of ages.

Kristine Stadig *has been a teacher for 26 years and serves as director of children's ministry at New Life Church (BIC Canada), Collingwood, ON.*

Editor's Notes

Subscription renewals and contributions: Thanks to everyone who has responded in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic to the 2020 subscription renewal letter. We depend on your subscription renewals and extra contributions. If you haven't yet responded, please do so as soon as possible. The basic subscription rate is $20 per year. Send a check payable to Brethren in Christ Church U. S. to the editor at the address on page 2. You can also subscribe and/or contribute online at bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom.

Topics for 2020: The Summer edition will likely explore how Christian faith informs how we relate to the state as we approach the U. S. presidential election this fall. Other possible upcoming topics are creation care, economic justice, and criminal justice reform (including mass incarceration). Contact the editor if you are interested in writing. Your comments and ideas are also always welcome.

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The Mingling of Ages

By Kristine Stadig

I AM SITTING at my window on a sunny morning, thinking about our young families who are likely going a bit crazy trying to keep kids busy, the volunteers who are taking meals to people who are shut in, and Lillian who is at the end stages of cancer. She is 89 and lives alone. We are in week seven of social isolating. I miss our togetherness. What I love is the messy mingling of ages. I love the mix of generations from varying backgrounds, lifestyles, and ages where we are all navigating ahead in our faith journey.

Imagine being with the community in Acts 2: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people" (Acts 2:46-47, NIV). We could add a prelude: "Bill and Mary Beth picked up Lillian and brought her to the gathering because she needed a ride. The children flocked in with excitement. . . ."

This would not have been a homogenous group gathered together, but families, single people, children, young adults, and elderly people—real people with complicated lives and distinct personalities. I am sure it wasn't always easy, but the value was in the togetherness. This is what we want in our churches today. We need to consider that each generation has experienced vastly different journeys with different perspectives on life.

The Silent Generation (born before 1946) lived through some difficult times. They are disciplined and self-sacrificing. Many are active and financially stable. They provide not only resources for the church but a wealth of wisdom. They need to be heard and valued. I have wonderful memories of a couple who have since passed on who were not only the founding members of our church, but a constant reminder to all of us of what God's intentions were. They held on to this vision when some strayed away from it. They were the pillars we came back to when we realigned our vision. Let's not forget to turn to couples like them for advice, consult them in our decisions, and be thankful for what their journeys can teach us.

Many Baby Boomers (1946-1964) have a strong work ethic and are independent. We often see them working in the church, bringing consistency to our ministries. Baby Boomers want to be involved. With grown children having moved away, they are looking for a family they can be part of. There can be a beautiful symbiotic relationship between the church and a generation with a desire to belong and work towards a greater purpose.

Generation X-ers (1965-1976) may have grown up with less economic stability, but they've risen up to take responsibility for their own well-being. We often hear Generation X called the middle child: the mediator between older and younger siblings. Imagine the insight that the middle child can bring to the older and younger generations. Gen-Xers may be able to bring the generations together. Generation X may be raising kids and looking after aging parents. They need our support. They need the church to provide the flexibility and grace when life calls them away. This is where I am—sandwiched between aging parents and university students. What I love about being in this generation is the diversity of conversations and relationships. We have taught our boys to value and respect their grandparents, creating a symbiotic relationship where they gain knowledge and wisdom from their grandparents and their grandparents receive from them the gift of time.

Millennials (1977-1995) are digitally savvy and have never known a life without the internet. What a wonderful resource to have in the church! May we have the flexibility to learn from them and may they have the patience to teach us! The challenge is they may be risk-adverse but crave connection. Over the years, I have learned so much when

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