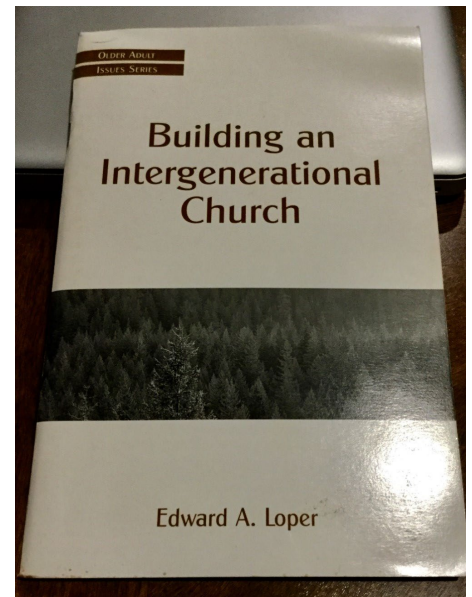


INTERGENERATIONAL OLDER ADULT MINISTRY

By Michele Hendrix – New Braunfels, Texas

The Older Adult Issue Series was published in 1999 for the Office of Older Adult Ministry, A Ministry of the General Assembly Council, and Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) in celebration of the 1999 United Nations *International Year of Older Persons*, the theme of which was “Toward a Society for All Ages.” The UN set forth “Principles for Older Persons,” in order to guide programming, celebrative activities, and dialogue concerning issues of older persons during the International Year of Older Persons. I still have that series of booklets and in preparing for the article in this Holiday Edition whose theme is *Older Adult Ministry is Intergenerational*, I reviewed *Building an Intergenerational Church* by Edward A. Loper. These booklets are no longer available in print but much of the information is as timely today as it was twenty years ago.

Interestingly, in 1999 this booklet stated “for the last twenty years or so the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been a leader among denominations talking about Older Adult Ministry.” In 2019 – twenty years later – the work of POAMN as advocates for Older Adult Ministry is still going strong and we are still talking about Older Adult Ministry. This means that for nearly 40 years we have taken the lead in OAM and the generations and are looked to as “trendsetters” on issues of aging, although there is no longer an Office of Older Adult Ministry in our denomination – whose median age is 63+. I found the information in this booklet as timely today as it was in 1999 when Edward Loper wrote it. It contained several “nougats” that are as fitting today as it was then, and I would like to share them with you.



“We need to look at older adult ministry as part of a much larger system. People don’t live in isolated subsets. Humans live in systems, connected to one another.”

“Along with the economic and racial distinctions we have always made, we have a whole new system of age distinction. More and more, we live in isolated units that interact less and less with the surrounding community.”

“Baby Boomers have been studied since the first one was born. All that study has shown us is that Baby Boomers are different, have different attitudes, are motivated differently, and will experience their aging

differently.”

“We are in the midst of a generational shift in power that calls for intergenerational understanding and solutions. We will need to expand older adult ministry and break down the age barriers that have separated generations, and to understand Baby boomers and their relationship to the generations that have come before and that will follow.”

What Ed Loper is speaking about here is Older Adult Ministry with Intergenerational Engagement. He is speaking of the relationship and connection that each generation has with the generations coming before and after them. “We now live in ways that no longer allow for older and younger generations to interact with one another and our culture is poorer for it. Churches are in a perfect position to build the type of intergenerational community that can do some of what extended family used to do. The church is the one place left in our culture where kids and older adults have an opportunity to experience one another in a meaningful way. Ultimately the point is transmitting values, and to that end intergenerational ministry is crucial.”

So, if we are to be intentional about using older adult and intergenerational ministry to transmit values, we need to be just as intentional about modeling the values we seek to teach. There are some wonderful models of age in the scriptures. Look at how often God goes to the older people to get something done. It suggests that we read the stories about Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Noah, and Jacob with an eye toward what these sagas say about age and wisdom. How well are we as individuals or the church living out what the scriptures tell us about age?

The church needs to be encouraged to look at aging and actually all of life in the light of scripture and our theology. Age is simply another stage of life to be lived and celebrated. One of the ways we can make a difference is by modeling how we serve those who are aging and all generations in our churches and communities. There is no doubt in 2019 that the church and older adult ministry, as well as intergenerational ministry, is changing or should be changing.

The Baby Boomers have moved into adulthood and now are moving into older adulthood, and what we call older adult ministry looks different. It is certain that this trend will continue because we are now only halfway through the Boomer Generation turning 65. For the next ten years, 10,000 Boomers a day, or 300 Boomers per minute, will be turning 65. The oldest of the GenX generation is now 54. The youngest members of the Builder Generation are 74 and the oldest are 88. That is well into another of the fastest-growing segments in our society, people who are age 85+. If we are to understand older adult ministry as an intergenerational

opportunity, it is imperative that we understand the relationships among the generations.

Over the past two decades there has been a change in our aging, a change in our culture, and a change in the church. Sometimes it has been subtle and understated, sometimes it has been significant! Some of this change was led by Baby Boomers, and as this generation has always done, it has remade, reformed, and renewed. Now is the time to focus on generational healing, which is the work of intergenerational ministry, bringing reconciliation to the generations. As Ed Loper states, “The work is to help us all understand that through the generations we have all experienced many of the same events but have experienced them differently. We have different understandings and different values.” Individually, “we understand our faith differently. We are not wrong. We are simply different.”

Reference:

“Building an Intergenerational Church”, Older Adult Issue Series by Edward A. Loper, published by Geneva Press in 1999.

*[Editor’s NOTE: **Michele Hendrix** is a past President of Presbyterian Older Adult Ministries Network, a Deacon, Stephen Leader, Caregiver Specialist, Speaker and Trainer with expertise in Older Adult Ministry and Caregiving. The focus of her work is on intergenerational and interfaith ministry.]*