

CONNECTIONAL LAY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF LAY MINISTRY
OF THE
CHRISTIAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH



THIRD QUARTER
PROGRAM OF STUDY
2008

"ALL OF GOD'S CHILDREN"

PREPARED BY:
CLIFFORD L. HARRIS, PRESIDENT
CONNECTIONAL LAY COUNCIL

DR. VICTOR TAYLOR, GENERAL SECRETARY
BISHOP THOMAS LANIER HOYT, JR., CHAIRMAN

INTRODUCTION

If the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and the organizations that make up the local, district, regional, and connectional core of our Zion are to grow and sustain themselves, leaders must become more aware, seek to understand, *and respond to* the various generations that exist within many of today's congregations. We live in a complex and changing world in which each generation reacts and often communicates differently from the one before it or the one that is to follow. In many large and even small congregations there are at least four different generations represented. They are identified as: (1) Veterans or Traditionalist (Born 1900 to 1945); (2) Baby Boomers (Born 1946 to 1964); (3) Generation X (Born 1965 to 1981); and (4) Generation Y (Born 1981 to 1999).

This Quarterly Program of Study is, therefore, written to provide insight about those who make up and will "potentially" make up our congregations and organizations. This lesson is further intended to encourage leaders to take a fresh look at the congregation and/or organization of which they are a part and/or responsible for. In addition, this lesson can and should create opportunities for collaborative efforts between Lay Councils and other church organizations (ie. the Board of Christian Education, Ministry To Men, Sunday School, etc.). The focus should be in the form of a question: *How Can We Become More Effective in Ministering to "All of God's Children?"* - Thus, as you begin this study, remember that all are valuable concerning *kingdom building*. The conclusive results should be: "Each generation should feel that they have a voice that will be heard, understood, and respected!"

CHARACTERISTICS OF "GOD'S CHILDREN"

Because one of the ingredients for great leadership is effective communication, - leaders should learn how to *effectively* converse with each group that is represented in their organization. Relative to the church, this means the congregation or an organization within the church body. Presiding Elder Richard C. Laskey, of the Oklahoma City District in the Oklahoma Region, says, "A leader must learn to lead from the "middle". In other words he/she must position themselves in a way that will allow them to equally minister to and/or lead all of those who are a part of the congregation or organization.

Thus, what is it that we must know and what are the characteristics of the four (4) generations mentioned in the introduction, to effectively minister to "All of God's Children?"

VETERANS – Honor chain of command; more formal in their approach to things; want to feel secure and that they are in control of what is going on around them; appreciate dedication; *save their money.*

BABY BOOMERS – Value personal conversation; tend to overwork themselves; tendency to use the by-now-pay-later financial ethic; reliable; definition of full-time work may be 50-60 hours per week; some are very competitive.

A Shared Characteristic of Veterans and Baby Boomers - Have a tendency to "over explain" concepts when troubleshooting or giving instructions.

Boomers are dedicated members and Veterans contribute a wealth of knowledge and experience.

GENERATION X – Want to get to the point; need space and independence; *conservative with their money*; do not blindly follow their leaders; many do not entertain the thought of being lifelong employees of one company or *lifelong members of one church*; need to know why, before they make a firm commitment; time is currency, thus they *may not use vacation time to attend church meetings*; will not stay in an unsatisfying organization or job indefinitely; likes immediate gratification.

GENERATION Y – Need challenges and excitement; very opinionated; need feedback; *earn money to spend*; restless/short attention span; high tech; have huge goal and aspirations, but may not have been trained on execution; need to follow leaders that they respect; may change jobs or church congregations many times in during their life.

Shared Characteristics of Generation X and Y - *Because they want to hurry and get at the heart of the things, (1) Generation X and Y- don't mind bypassing the chain of command; (2) When securing information the tendency is to get only what is needed and be on their way; (3) Technology doesn't frighten them; (4) *Loves communicating by email and text messaging.*

***New language**

#'s look gd...Inch@1 I/b back l8r

(The numbers look good. I'm leaving for lunch at 1 p.m. and I'll be back later.)

Note: *More than ever before, we must understand that outside factors impact the way that generations communicate and the younger generations are geared to a fast-paced environment.*

INSIGHT INTO LEADING AND RETAINING "GOD'S CHILDREN"

VETERANS

- a. Show respect for their expertise and experience.
- b. Show sensitivity to health challenges.
- c. Don't push to change; instead give time to think and learn in their own way.
- d. Teach new technologies at a slow pace and give support.
- e. Schedule meeting ahead of time; they don't respond well to impromptu meetings.
- f. When providing information and/or introducing a new concept, put things in historical prospective (prefer to make decisions based on what worked in the past).

BOOMERS

- a. Have been dedicated for many years, but may now need flexible alternatives because some are working after retirement or caring for grandchildren or aging parents.
- b. Offer the opportunity to learn and stretch their knowledge; expose to and teach new technologies.
- c. Don't feel threatened because they ask question; involve them in the decision making process; they need to feel valued and needed.

GENERATION X

- a. Provide feedback and affirmations.
- b. Cut through the chase and avoid unnecessary meetings.
- c. Encourage their sense of independence.
- d. Want fulfilling involvement.

GENERATION Y

- a. Need to feel like they are making a difference.
- b. Need to be creatively challenged.
- c. Electronic communication is preferred; may be slow to return phone calls or respond to letters.
- d. Allow them a voice; communicate messages and desires from a positive frame of reference.
- e. Don't overload with information and turn them loose with the expectation that "they will do just fine."
- f. Be a mentor, not a taskmaster.

ABC'S TO BRIDGING THE GENERATIONAL GAP

IF ORGANIZATIONAL COHESIVENESS DOES NOT ALREADY EXIST AND THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION, COOPERATION, AND INCLUSIVENESS ARE IN QUESTION, WHAT MUST LEADERS DO TO BRIDGE THE GAP?

Avoid negative age based assumptions; recognize that everyone has the potential to bring different and insightful ideas.

Be open-minded to learning new ways of doing things and be receptive to time-tested ideas.

Create an environment where all members have meaningful opportunity to contribute.

Design new approaches to old challenges.

Establish communication skills that are appropriate for each group.

Figure out a plan and start teaching and training the next wave of leaders.

Give yourself equally to everyone.

Hold yourself accountable and take the lead in establishing a spirit of unity.

Invest in the development of members and potential leaders by encouraging growth and providing learning opportunities.

Judge NOT; PRAISE A LOT!

Kee your *focus* on understanding others and *avoid* complaining about others not understanding you.

Lead from the middle.

Mentoring roles for seasoned leaders helps the transfer of knowledge.

Never lift one group at the expense of another.

Offer assistance and don't wait to be asked.

Positively affirm the worth and value of everyone.

Quietly and confidently address congregational/organizational conflicts in a timely manner.

R each, teach, and empower.

S eparate ego when addressing problems.

Tackle problems and not people.

Utilize the energy of all.

Visualize oneness and work to achieve it.

Work to build leaders, not just followers.

Xray those who make up the organization and understand what is on the inside.

Yield NOT to the temptation of giving up before you get started.

Zero in; roll up your sleeves; go to work; stay focused!

CONCLUSION

As we study, understand, and reflect about each of these generations, we, as a church on every level, must be sensitive to the challenges that *each* face. For instance, Veterans or Seniors, many times, want to do more and give the way they once did, but may face the real problem of tackling high health insurance premiums, prescription cost, and mounting utility bills. Many Baby Boomers and some Veterans are faced with the added responsibility and cost of raising grandchildren and/or being caregivers for aging parents. While this reality seems to have always been a thread in our society, the challenges are more pronounced and far-reaching than ever before.

Because a dollar does not go as far as in the past, Generations X and Y are faced with financial mountains that are slippery and very hard to climb.

All over the Church, it is critical that stewardship principles continue to be taught and saving and investing strategies be *employed* to help those who have a heart to give and a desire to help keep the church on solid ground.

In encouraging congregational and organizational participation, we must, like never before, meet "folks" where they live!" When meetings and workshops are planned, leaders must find *more ways* to make information, teaching, and training more convenient to the learners; if sessions are more conducive during the week, find ways to accommodate those in need; if young adults are challenged with child care problems when deciding whether to stay home or attend a meeting, organize a volunteer core to assist with the child care needs; if the youth will commit to attending Bible Study, as a group on another evening other than Wednesday, - make it happen; if learners respond better to electronic presentations, get in gear and move into the 21st century!

I trust that this study will be shared and discussed in a spirit of positive reflection, assessment and committed action in ministering and being sensitive to "All of God's Children".