

PEACE

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Empowering Youth to Be Ministers of Peace and Justice

Understanding the Generations

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Become Aware

There are many approaches to understanding human behavior—personality types, family structures, birth order—just to name a few. Since the baby boom following World War II, when soldiers returned to their families and either started or continued the creation of families, another method of understanding humans has emerged: generational studies. While most, if not all, methods fall short, there are some trends that prove helpful in understanding others.

Sociologists explain that our values are usually formed by around the age of eight. This will never be an exact science, since it will always be influenced by individual development, family situations, and the world in which the young person is living. This environment is different for each person, but major world events and trends can have a determination on what a generation of people tend to value and how they generally choose to live.

There are at least four categories of generations currently living in Western society: Boosters, born 1925 to 1942; Boomers, born 1943 to 1960; Busters (Generation X), born 1961 to 1981; and Bridgers (Millennials), born since 1982. Each generation has been shaped by uniquely different worlds. The Boosters witnessed World War II and the Great Depression when

they were around eight. The Boomers witnessed the expanse of television, the emergence of rock and roll, and the space program. The Busters have experienced a world shaped by the *Challenger* space shuttle explosion, the beginning of the digital revolution, and the fall of communism. For the Bridger generation, the world has grown much smaller through Internet and cell phone use. Multi-cultural world news is shared almost instantly. Families rarely fall into the “traditional” categories of generations. They have seen violence come into their schools, into their entertainment, and news, but the threat of a world war was not their problem—at least not until 9-11-01. The next generation, though not yet officially named, will undoubtedly be greatly influenced by the threat of terrorism in their own land.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Acknowledge Responsibility

- Who do you connect with easier: your parents, your grandparents, or other adults?
- What are the greatest areas of contentions you have observed among generations in your family? congregation? community?
- What are three specific things you have learned from someone in the Booster or Boomer generations?
- What impact does understanding your parents' or grandparents' generation have on your life?
- What is your responsibility (and the ability) to listen and affirm the uniqueness of one another, no matter what the generation?
- What part of your faith do you wish to pass on to future generations?

Deuteronomy 11:2–3 NRSV

Remember today that it was not your children (who have not known or seen the discipline of the LORD your God), but it is you who must acknowledge his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm.

Psalm 78:1–4 NRSV

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation.

Psalm 145:4 NRSV

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

2 Timothy 1:5 NRSV

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

Acquire More Understanding

Listening to the Generations

The generation labels apply to the Western culture. However, no matter where you live, generalities can probably be discovered among people of specific generations as a result of their common environmental experiences. Using the ages of Booster, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers, interview three people from each generation—including your own. Ask each person the same questions. A spreadsheet format may help in evaluating similarities and differences.

major events in history	years in school	work ethic	family structure/ "roles"	entertainment	newest technology	influence of religion	attitudes about money
music and literature	"rules" for dating	slang terms	attitudes toward war and peace	modes of communication	teen pressures	fashion trends	favorite causes

History Time Line

Create a history time line for your country from 1920 to present. Include any of the above subjects interesting to you. Contrast these events to the people you know. How have the events of your country helped to shape the people?

Television Influence

We can see the connection between the consumerism that developed during the Boomer generation and television. Watch a variety of television for two evenings. Write down all the hidden messages you see (stereotypes, expectations for youth, advertisements, and attitudes).

The Family Tree

Research and discover how the lives of the people in your past impacted who and where you are today. With the help of family and friends, trace your family genealogy as far back as you can. The more information you can find out about each generation the better.

Music: A Reflection of the Times?

Listen to popular music from each of the four designated generations. What do the lyrics of these songs tell you about the life and times?

A Day in Their World

Ever wish you could trade places with your parents or grandparents to better understand what they think? Or wouldn't it be nice if they could live in your world for awhile? How would they handle the pressures of today? How would you handle their pressures? Check out these movie videos for a glimpse of what it might be like.

Back to the Future
Big

Freaky Friday
Like Father Like Son



Take Action

- As a service to your congregation, plan to videotape the stories that members of various ages have about their childhood, church experiences, or youth camps. Include at least one member from each generation. In preparation for doing this, interview different people about their stories, and select from among them those who are willing to go before the camera. For others, type their stories and offer them for a congregational newsletter or similar publication.

- Take a look at the major world events that have taken place in your life. Determine how they have impacted you.

- Arrange for your congregation, family, or other intergenerational group to participate in a low ropes course together.
- Sponsor game nights where different generations teach one another their favorite games.
- Sponsor a movie club. Each month, one person from each generation recommends a movie for others to rent and watch. Gather to discuss the movies (possibly by e-mail). How well do they represent the times in which they were created? What is their most important message? What can other generations learn from them?
- Sponsor a book club. Follow a similar format as described for the movie club.
- Participate in grandparent programs. Visit the elderly in their places of residence, and listen to the stories they have to tell.
- Plan a party that celebrates all the generations represented in your congregation.
- Encourage your family to set aside one night a week as family night. The more extended the family, the better.
- Fix a meal for your family. Ask them to sit down and share it together.
- If you are age fifteen or over, assist in the church nursery with an adult supervisor. (Both adult and teen must be a registered youth worker.)

Become an Advocate

- Attend community meetings, church business meetings, and/or school groups. Help generations understand one another and the issues of your generation.
- Ask to be on your congregation's worship or music planning team at church. Advocate for a balance of ministry and music that speaks to all generations.
- Speak up when groups of teens are critical of other generations. Stop the jokes, and help your peers understand why they might act and react as they do.