

The Church's Utilization of All Those Retirees—

From Success to Significance

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Recently, in a Western state, a Nazarene layperson was driving me to the airport in his Mercedes-Benz. This was a man who had chaired a corporation, been president of a bank, and who had managed all sorts of successful business ventures. But now he was sharing with me his desire and that of his wife to do mission work overseas. As an aging boomer, he wanted to move from success to significance.

UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY

Baby boomer retirees could become an unprecedented resource for the church. The first wave of boomers turned 50 in 1996, and the number is now increasing at the rate of 4 million a year. Seventy-six million persons are over 50 years of age today representing 27.7% of the population. Their number will expand to 96 million (32.4%) by 2010, and to 124 million, or 36% of the population by 2030. Retirees are a main reason that the share of non-working adults in the USA is already ten times greater than in 1900.¹

Retirement itself is a fairly new concept historically. As Kornblum and Julian point out in their classic Social Problems, “before the advent of Social Security and

¹ John J. Macionis, Society: The Basics, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000) p. 76.

pension plans, few workers could afford to stop working. As a result, people worked into old age...”²

Many are even taking early retirement. Like my friend in Arizona, boomer retirees are asking the question, “Is that all there is?” They are contemplating what they will do with the rest of their lives. Life expectancy is estimated to increase to 82-89 in 2050, with the probability that a 65 year old will reach 95 on average.

My former professor at Harvard University, Talcott Parsons, was a definite advocate of the need to find roles for older people that would function well, both for them and for society. Parsons believed that the USA had failed to provide those necessary roles. Parsons, as a precursor of disengagement theory, believed that the role of work should be abandoned and substituted with new forms of productive activity (although he himself was not a good example as I recall he was quite old at the time I did my post-doctoral studies with him).

Activity theory, on the other hand, holds that older persons can best serve themselves by remaining active. Although disengagement theory and activity theory are often seen as opposites,³ in a sense they both call for continued, useful, activity.

The folks who are surrendering their “work roles” are not poor. “Since 1980, seniors have posted a 25 percent increase in income (in constant dollars), while the income of people ages twenty-five to thirty-four has stayed the same.”⁴ The aging boomers may well have more funds available to them as a group than any comparable cohort in history.

² William Kornblum and Joseph Julian, Social Problems (10th Edition) (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), p. 330.

³ Cf, for example, the discussion in Richard P. Appelbaum and William J. Chambliss, Sociology, (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), pp. 308-309.

The combination of this rapidly growing group of retirees with time on their hands and money in their pockets represents a singular opportunity for the Church of the Nazarene. The Church must assist this cohort, as Jim Miner has said, by “adding life to years, not just years to life.”⁵

VOLUNTEERS IN THE CHURCH

WORK AND WITNESS

Sociologically, Work and Witness did not begin as a church sponsored program. It originated as a spontaneous volunteer lay movement.

At the General Assembly of 1952 men were given rights to vote and hold office in what had previously been called the Women’s Missionary Society. But it was not until twenty years later, in 1972, that the first man was elected to the Nazarene World Missionary Society council. Dr. Paul Gamertsfelder from Ohio was elected on a ground swell of interest among laypersons in developing a “men in missions” movement.

The purpose of Men in Mission is to
communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ
by sharing our faith with others
through fellowship, by witnessing,
and by working side by side
with missionaries and pastors...⁶

The first overseas trip (by five men, including Dr. Gamertsfelder), did not occur until January 15-25, 1974. This trip to Panama was called a “crusade” (probably not the best word choice), and the men were called the “crusaders.”

The Crusaders handed out tracts,
witnessed on the streets, took part

⁴ John J. Macionis, Society: The Basics, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000) p. 78.

⁵ James L. Miner, “The Middle Adult Challenge,” Handout, n.d., p. 4.

⁶ Carl J. Stowell, quoted in James Hudson, Work and Witness, (Kansas City: NPH, 1983), p. 15.

in church services and in outdoor
Sunday School classes. They
traveled up the Bayano River
in a motorized dugout to witness
to the outlying Choco (people)...⁷

Sometime during this period the idea of putting construction work together with witnessing occurred. Laypersons began to bombard headquarters with the idea of taking a team to a world area. Far from supporting such a move, the head of the Department of World Mission opposed it. Dr. E.S. Phillips had said “no” to this request twice, but the third time he relented and allowed the team to proceed.⁸

Resistance, however, continued apace in Kansas City. Dr. Jerald Johnson, who became head of World Mission upon the death of Dr. Phillips, saw the large drain on funds for building supplies and said, “This will not work.” It was decided to require each team to raise a large sum of money (initially \$5,000) for materials. One leader said publicly, “I knew for a fact that that would kill it.”⁹

But it did not “kill it.” Nazarene laypersons responded gladly with the money in a spontaneous movement of people and funds.

What is today called Work and
Witness in the Church of the Nazarene
is not a planned program of the
World Mission Division. No committees
were named, no studies were made,
no seminars were held...
it just seemed to happen among
Nazarene laymen...the involvement
was almost like spontaneous combustion.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁸ David Hayse, Interview, December 10, 2001.

⁹ Ibid.-

World Mission in early 1975 responded by naming a part-time coordinator to work with the laypersons. “Work and Witnessing Missions” was the term chosen to describe this “spontaneous missionary phenomenon.” The name was later shortened to simply “Work and Witness.”

By this time, the general church caught on to what was happening. In a sociologically functional manner, the church decided to let this “volunteer movement” grow as it would.

A basic philosophy was agreed on in the World Mission Division that no attempt would be made to control, structure or program this spontaneous volunteer lay missionary movement.¹¹

The lack of coordination in this rapidly accelerating movement was apparent. In the early 1980’s a work and witness accident (and resultant \$2.5 million law-suit) and other issues prompted Louie Bustle and James Hudson to persuade then Division head Dr. L. Guy Nees to appoint a full-time Work and Witness Coordinator. Rev. David Hayse, who had served in Ecuador and at the time was facilitating Work and Witness teams in Mexico, was appointed and moved to Kansas City in 1984.

As Work and Witness teams and participants multiplied with lightning speed, Hayse felt like he was riding the crest of a wave. He knew that some had said, “If Kansas City ever gets involved with this it will kill it.” Hayse wisely took the stance that he would not be a Director of Work and Witness but only a facilitator.¹²

¹⁰ James Hudson, Work and Witness, (Kansas City: NPH, 1983), p. 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹² David Hayse, Interview, December 10, 2001.

However, with teams from so many local churches fanning out to multiplied places throughout the world, it was even difficult to know what was going on. The accident lawsuit was actually the stimulus that provided the solution. It was decided that every team member should be required to have accident insurance and a central insurance program was developed. All teams had to either subscribe to this insurance, or find a similar policy.¹³ This proved to be the solution. Rev. Hayse says,

The insurance program helped us—that was the “hook” that we needed to help us know who was going where and when. It has worked remarkably to our advantage.¹⁴

Work and Witness expanded throughout the 1990’s and reached a total of 11,000 participants by 2000. Domestic projects were included as well. In 2001, nearly 2,000 Nazarenes (including volunteers from Dominican Republic, India and Mexico) contributed 68,000 hours of work to people with needs in the city of Indianapolis as a gigantic “Work and Witness” team called “One heart, Many Hands” prior to General Assembly.¹⁵

Fifteen years ago Rodney Stark made the statement that “baby boomers, with a reputation as a self-centered generation, are less likely to perform volunteer work.”¹⁶ The remarkable (even stunning) success of volunteerism in the Church of the Nazarene would seem to belie this claim. The following chart documents participation in Work and Witness since its inception in 1974:

¹³ Sociologically, it is interesting to note that World Mission provided teams the loophole of finding their own policy with “terms that meet our standards” specifically to keep the appearance of “bureaucracy” down. In all of these years, no one has been able to produce such an alternate policy.

¹⁴ David Hayse, Interview, December 10, 2001.

Since 1996, when the Boomers came on-line, there has been a considerable up-tick in participation in Work and Witness teams (from 339 teams in 1995 to 643 teams in 2000). The number of participants has nearly doubled (from 5,277 in 1995 to 9,423 in 2001). Like the Church of Christ, we even have an RV Work and Witness program that primarily operates as a domestic program.

NIVS

As Work and Witness expanded in the last two decades of the twentieth century, a remarkable corollary developed. Some Work and Witness team members began to say “I don’t want to go home after two weeks. I have a skill, time, money, and health. I want to stay here and help.”

As people began staying on, another new program was spontaneously generated: Nazarenes in Volunteer Service (NIVS). As this program quickly grew, problems developed. Older people sometimes became sick, necessitating medical evacuations. In fact, the program nearly self-destructed. But here as well as earlier the central insurance plan became a stabilizing factor. An organized NIVS plan is now in place.

The number of volunteers serving in NIVS has shown dramatic growth, as this graph indicates.

There is some effort to train these volunteers in required “Cross-Cultural Orientation” sessions.

Douglas Terry is completing a doctoral dissertation on the effectiveness of volunteers in NIVS, whom he calls “mid-termers.”¹⁷ Most missiologists believe that the people who benefit most from short-term projects overseas are “the short-termers

¹⁵ Ron and Laura Sylvester, E-mail, August 7, 2001.

¹⁶ Rodney Stark, Sociology (2nd Edition), (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1987), p. 490.

themselves and their sending churches.”¹⁸ Terry set out to examine the “missional effectiveness” of mid-termers. He gathered data via mail and e-mail questionnaires from a selected sample of 299 past mid-termers (140 with responses), as well as “at least one career missionary and at least one local, national Christian with whom each mid-termer served on-site,”¹⁹ and statistically analyzed the data. According to Terry,

...any mid-term missionary who contributed significantly to a mission ministry and its goals, witnessed effectively about Christ, was satisfied with his or her ministry, was deemed suitable for this ministry, was able to communicate adequately with those ministered to, had a good relationship with at least one on-site career missionary, had a good relationship with at least one on-site national Christian, and the recipients of whose ministry were satisfied with it, is by definition effective missionally.²⁰

Terry developed a Missional Effectiveness Index (MEI) based on the variables mentioned above. He then correlated these MEI scores with a number of other variables. Not surprisingly, the most important variable was found to be language ability.²¹

Element seven, language ability, surfaced as the single most important variable. With its extraordinary 0.767 Pearson’s correlation with MEI, its strong

¹⁷ A term used by Missiologist Miriam Adeney.

¹⁸ John Nyquist and Paul G. Hiebert, “Short-term Missions?” *Trinity World Forum* 20 (3), 1995, 3; quoted in Douglas W. Terry, “Short-termers over the Long Run: Assessing Missional Effectiveness of: Non-Career, Mid-term, Nazarene Missionaries,” Unpublished Dissertation, 2002, 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²¹ Cf. Charles Gailey, ‘Language As a Means of Conflict Resolution in the International Church,’ Paper given at ANSR, Feb. 9, 1990.

showing in the backwards stepwise regression, and its apparent impact on the demographic variable 'site,' it seems to have the potential of greatly impacting mid-termers' missional effectiveness.²²

The second most important variable contributing to a high MEI is cultural adaption. The third is developing and maintaining good interpersonal relationships. The fourth is spiritual readiness.

The variable which was also of some importance in Terry's study, and to us as well, is the variable of age. The study demonstrates that "mid-termers between approximately 55 and 64 years of age typically exhibit superior missional effectiveness."²³ NIVS personnel in recent years are being categorized as "missionaries" and indeed, some have joined the ranks of career missionaries in the Church.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS AND THE BOOMERS

Baby boomers are heavily involved in both Work and Witness and the NIVS programs. Although it is difficult to uncover age frequency distributions, Nazarene boomers have been profoundly impacted by these spontaneously generated, "grass-roots" movements.

This phenomena is not exclusive to the Church of the Nazarene. In an article entitled, "Boomers, Busters and Missions," Ken Baker has pointed out that many of the ldest Boomers, now in their fifties, are giving their lives to a second career in missions.²⁴

²² Douglas W. Terry, "Unpublished Dissertation," pg. 199.

²³ Ibid., p. 201.

²⁴ Ken Baker, "Boomers, Busters and Missions: Things Are Different Now," Evangelical Missions Quarterly 33 (1), 1997, pp. 70-77, quoted in Douglas W. Terry, Unpublished Dissertation, p. 45.

The involvement of large number of Boomers in the mission enterprise is having two major effects. The first is on the sending church and the second is on the Boomers themselves.

1. Effect on the Sending Church

David Hayse says,

Aside from the effect on the receiving church, Work and Witness has made an incredible impact on the sending church. People in the pew have a new awareness of their sense of value—that they can have a “hands on” relationship to mission.²⁵

We know, of course, that the “hands on” feeling has particular appeal to boomers.

James Engel and Jerry Jones, in their book, Baby Boomers and the Future of World Mission,²⁶ studied 280 professional, evangelical Christian baby boomers in 21 churches.

Only 10% of boomers as a whole prioritized cross-cultural evangelization, but this figure rose to 74% for those who had helped on-site in overseas mission and 76% for boomers active in personal evangelism.²⁷

2. Effect on the Boomers Themselves

²⁵ David Hayse, Interview, December 10, 2001.

²⁶ James Engel and Jerry Jones, Baby Boomers and the Future of World Missions, (Orange, CA: Management Development Associates, 1989).

²⁷ Quoted in commentary on the book by Douglas W. Terry, Unpublished Dissertation, pp. 25-26.

A theology of selfless service to others is biblically based. It is more blessed to give than to receive. If one gives her or his life away one will find it.

Edward C. Lindeman said:

The act of volunteering is an assertion of individual worth. The person who of his own free will decides to work...is in effect saying, I have gifts and talents which are needed. I am a person who accepts a responsibility, not because it is imposed upon me, but rather because I wish to be useful. My right to be thus used is a symbol of my personal dignity and worth!²⁸

In several ways, the Boomer retiree's life is enriched by entering the ranks of the volunteers.

Recommendations

1. The Church should applaud the excellent record of volunteerism within its ranks, and prepare to further expand opportunities for volunteers, including in the local church.²⁹
2. Enhanced training programs, especially as they relate to language acquisition and cultural adaptation, should be provided to NIVS personnel, based on Douglas Terry's research.
3. The Church, following Paul Tournier's suggestions, should stress the issues of significance, meaning and purpose in encouraging boomer retirees to volunteer.

²⁸ Julietta K. Arthur, Retire to Action: A Guide to Voluntary Service, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), p. 38.

²⁹ Kansas City First Church requires more than 300 volunteers each week in order to operate.

CONCLUSION

Volunteerism seems to have received a shot in the arm since 9-11. President Bush' call for an expanded AmeriCorp and a new "Freedom Corp" has created a fresh surge of interest. Margaret Carlson, writing in a Time editorial last month comments, "Volunteerism hasn't been cool since Camelot...(this is our) first chance to turn the Selfish Generation into something more like the Greatest Generation...to help our indulgent generation awaken to what (Senator John) McCain describes as "a cause larger than ourselves."³⁰

Asking boomers to volunteer in their retirement is a win-win proposition for the Church of the Nazarene. Encouraging short-term and mid-term mission, as well as volunteering in the local church, will not just enhance the work of the Church of the Nazarene. The Church will also assist the boomers themselves in being fulfilled by looking not just to their own interests "but to the interests of others."³¹

By giving up old stereotypes about mature people, and by adopting a new paradigm that stresses the satisfaction and revitalization of volunteer service, the Church of the Nazarene can guide our retirees to a new sense of meaning and fulfillment as they move from success to significance.

³⁰ Margaret Carlson, "All Together Now," Time, (Vol. 159:6), February 11, 2002, p. 33.

³¹ Philippians 2:4.

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