

Differing perspectives were shared during last Sunday's Congregational Dialogue regarding the transitional period and where Shalom is on the congregational lifecycle. There were noticeable differences between those who have been at Shalom for 20+ years and those arriving in the last 10 years. This is normal.

Generational differences complicate this reality. Douglas Alan Walrath (Frameworks: Patterns of living and believing today, 1987), suggests that what was going on in society when a generation was coming of age (late teens/early 20s), will shape that generation for the rest of their lives.

The Silent Generation (1923-44) came of age during the Great Depression: they will always see *stability* as normal.

Baby Boomers (1945-64) came of age during the turbulent 60s & 70s (Civil Rights, Vietnam War, etc.): they see *change* as normal. Yes, boomers tend to mellow as they age, but they still view change as normal: e.g. they expect their aging experiences to be greatly improved compared with previous generations. Boomers' outlook: It can always be fixed.

Generation X (1961-81) came of age during frightening developments (Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, Challenger explosion): they see *erosion* as normal. They tend toward pragmatism: grab hold of what I can because it's only going to get worse.

That's where Walrath stopped in 1987. Here is my humble sequel for Millennials/Generation Y (1975-95). They came of age when post-modernism was well entrenched: normal *no longer exists*.

Others have noted dramatic shifts in career perspectives at the time each generation came of age. The Silent Generation planned on one career and one employer—for life. Boomers planned on one career, with several employers during their working years. Generation X anticipated two or three different careers in their working years, and numerous employers. Some Millennials begin with simultaneous careers because they know many career fields can end abruptly.

What might be implications for congregations?

1. Intergenerational programming and communication is essential.
2. GenXers and Millennials bring their unique perspectives on life to faith and congregational life. Theological or worship style differences can mask these more foundational realities.
3. The Silent Generation (and to a lesser extent, Boomers) value institutions, and the long/hard work of developing and maintaining them. The younger generations tend to see that as an unwise investment strategy. They have watched too many institutions become rigid and unresponsive to current realities. Things change so rapidly that immediate action is required. There's no time to pay dues or learn the ropes. They want to make a difference now.

I don't think any generation can claim their outlook is better than another. It has served/is serving each generation well. All of these generational perspectives have strengths and limitations. Can we value the gathered wisdom that is present among four distinct generations in one congregation?

Having made that point, if we want to be attractive to the younger generations, it's incumbent upon the older generations to realize that our perspectives tend to increasingly be less effective as resources in today's context. Us old folk will always be the repository of life wisdom that transcends generational differences. It's not about being put out to pasture. But younger generations have figured out how to navigate today's world, while us older folk just scratch our heads. Let's listen carefully to what our younger brothers and sisters have learned.

The children of Israel learned well how to survive as urban slaves in Egypt: wisdom and strategy was passed on from generation to generation. But life as a free people in a new land, called for *new* resources, wisdom, strategy and leaders. That's precisely what they were learning in the 40 year transitional period in the wilderness.

-Gary Martin

Looking Ahead:

Aug. 21 9:30 a.m. *Oaks of Righteousness* Isaiah 61:1-4; 65:17-25

Aug. 28 9:30 a.m. Sermon, Pastor Brian

Sept. 11 11:00 a.m. Congregational Dialogue #4: TBD

Gary's projected in town schedule: Aug. 21-23; 28-29; Sept. 11-14