Initial Report on Boomerstock

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“Boomerstock” was a 4 day colloquium sponsored by the Aging and Older Adult Ministries section of Discipleship Ministries (formerly General Board of Discipleship) of the United Methodist Church. Over 100 people from all but 5 annual conferences in the United States were present. The colloquium featured some of the top resource people in the United States to help us understand the demographics, desires, longings, values, patterns, and beliefs of the group born between 1946--1964 known as Baby Boomers. (However, at this point in history, we should call them “Boomers”, not “Baby Boomers.”)

We had 7 presentations

- Marketing to Boomers presented by Brent Green
- Meeting the Needs of Boomers with Carol Osborn
- Life Situations with Rick Moody
- Understanding African American Boomers with Vance Ross
- Boomer Spirituality with Craig Miller
- Spiritual But Not Religious with Linda Mercadante
- Insights into Boomer Behavior with Tom Bandy

The purpose of these presentations was not to tell us how to launch a movement, but to better understand the dynamics of and dispel the myths about Boomers. The participants were then asked to spread this information within our annual conferences and have some serious thought and action about starting specifically targeted “Boomer” ministries. These should be new ministries, not lumped together with senior ministries or adult ministries. Boomers do not see themselves as “seniors” and will stay away from such programs.

Unbeknownst to the 2 of us from Cal/Nev., the Rev. Linda Kelly (Newcastle) was sent by her local church. She would like to be included in helping us get the information and excitement about Boomer ministry out to our conference.

Also, the Rev. Dr. Will Randolph, director of Aging and Older Adult Ministries of Discipleship Ministries (and the key force behind this colloquium) would love to come to our conference and help us put on an event about Boomer ministry. He would also like to do something for the Western Jurisdiction on the same topic.

We received many hand-outs, website recommendations, and reading lists. I can have some of those available at our Dec. 13th meeting. In the meantime, here are some book titles that the speakers thought were particularly good:
Thank you for allowing me to be one of the representatives from the Cal/Nev. Annual Conference and sending me to this thought provoking, challenging, and fun (especially the Woodstock era band and dance with 60’s clothing!) event.

Now the real work begins!

To get the creative juices flowing, I’d like to share a handout that was given to us as we left the colloquium on Saturday. It is entitled:

“12 Step Boomer Ministry Principles”:

1. What’s in a Name…everything! It is branding and identity. Boomers do not feel old or do not believe terms are like them or anything like that is not them. So ministries and groups should have a catchy non-descript name. Names like +50 or Encore Ministries.

2. Boomer Ministry to be successful should be built from scratch. It is new construction, not renovation. Don’t just try to add it on to Older Adult Ministries. It will not work.

3. Start by locating partners with which to work. All movements begin with one person but it is the second person who joins in which really counts. Locate a partner to share your dreams and to be a critical focus as you build your ministry. Also you cannot do the work alone so it is helpful if you have a partner. Make partners with clergy in your church. Make partners with the lay servants in your church. Make partners of the Bishop by starting with conference staff and the superintendents.

4. Read everything you can about Boomers culture and theory. Get to know your target and target types. Not all Boomers are the same. If you are a Boomer, do not assume you know Boomers because you are one or your experiences are typical. But reading is not the same nor shall be confused with actually putting it into practice. Do the homework. Boomers are information junkies, so appeal to it by knowing more about them, than they know about themselves.
5. Start small. Locate a need, desire, dream for all Boomers which become access points for Boomers like Retirement pre-planning, Health and Wellness, Grand parenting, Educational Travel, Singles/Widows, Service, etc., choosing one and develop a plan to address this first effort. Start with one access point and then develop a plan of how to address it.

6. Find your niche. You do this by being cognizant of the types of Boomers and their differences and their similarities with those in your church. Choose a type of Boomer within your community and concentrate on building relationships with this type of Boomer. It is easier to start with the type of Boomers which are closest to the majority of your own. Then invite outside Boomers of the type you are seeking to attract in your efforts to give you feed back about whether they are attracted to your niche or not and what would it take for them to become attracted to your efforts.

7. While Boomer ministry needs order and structure, it doesn’t need hierarchy. Boomers are about equality. Emphasize shared responsibility and guidance with rotation of leadership or better yet have governance by committee. Consensus and creativity rule among decision making with Boomers do let them decide important directions for their own group.

8. Help Boomers make connections. What is the antidote for isolation and loneliness? Community! So be familiar with ice breakers or group dynamics and community building activities which are fun, entertaining, and help build friendships.

9. Analyze, evaluate, and review every step of the way. Locate the mistakes and understand what they teach you. Highlight your successes and understand why it worked so very well with Boomers. Allow Boomers to give you input because Boomers want to be taken seriously and many are willing to share their opinion.

10. Always be aware of your Boomer’s schedules or available gathering time and not schedule any conflicts. Boomers are performance driven and so many have overloaded schedules. Flexibility, options, and brevity are friends. Help them to prioritize their time and to slow down, by offering uniqueness and opportunity to slow down and relax if they wish to linger.

11. Offer variety and options. Boomers are used to choices and custom fits. Even offer do-it-yourself opportunities or self-help to appeal to the individualism of Boomers, but do it within the context of a group so they can share their individuality with others.

12. Nostalgia, Recreation, Humor, and Play are important for Boomers and they can lead to much deeper spiritual awakenings and reflections, so use them immediately!