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“The Sharpening” e-newsletter

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17)

We are glad that you have taken a moment to read the *Best of the Sharpening*, a quarterly newsletter by and for ministers working with adults 55 plus. Let me share with you a bit more about the organization. Metro 55+ is a group of full-time ministers, serving in larger Southern Baptist Churches across the convention, that have the privilege of leading ministries to, thru, and with adults 55 and up. Each year, members benefit from an annual spring conference where networking, equipping, and encouragement take place. This conference provides a great opportunity to learn from one another and gain valuable ministry insights. In addition to the annual meeting, group members benefit from quarterly Zoom meetings where ministry hot topics are discussed and through the quarterly newsletter “The Sharpening.” You will find more information about the membership requirements for the organization on the Metro55plus.com home page.

 **Devotion: Brought to you by Woods Watson**

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Preparing for God’s Blessings

Some things should not be told. These three jokes come to mind:

* My friend told me he had the body of a Greek god. I had to explain to him that Buddha is not Greek.
* I was wondering why the ball kept getting bigger and bigger, and then it hit me.
* Q: What starts with E, ends with E, and has only 1 letter in it? A: Envelope.

Thom Rainer, who has served at Lifeway as President for many years, is disarmingly transparent in what he tells. I regularly think, “I would not be that honest in the things I write.” In his January 7, 2019 email article, “Six Reasons Why Some Church Members Resist Growth,” he tells of a true church encounter 25 years ago. “The confrontation was probably one of my more sobering moments as a pastor. The woman, a long-term church member, used the classic moment right before I preached to tell me God had spoken to her. He told her under no uncertain terms I was supposed to leave the church.

My first challenge was to figure out why God had told her and not me. It seemed like direct communication would have been far more efficient. My second challenge was framed in a simple one-word question, ‘Why?’ She responded with smug certainty, ‘Because all of these new Christians are messing up our church.’

Oh.

Of course, I am not alone in dealing with this perplexing reality. Many church members really don’t want to see their churches grow. Some of them are content with sufficient growth to pay the bills, but none thereafter. I have learned from countless pastors and members over the years why this seeming Great Commission disobedience is so pervasive in many churches. Here are six of the most common reasons.

1. **Relational patterns are disrupted**. Growth brings new members to ministries, groups, and church social functions. Leadership may shift with the incoming new members. Many members are simply not comfortable with new attendees changing long-term relationship patterns.
2. **Many are too comfortable with the status quo**. They would rather obey the perceived mandate of the Great Comfort than the mandate of the Great Commission.
3. **Some have a me-centric view of congregational life**. Thus, the church exists for me, myself and I. It’s all about my worship style, my programs, my ministries, and my pew. The church is more like a country club where I pay my dues and get my perks. If the new people get in my way as the church tries to reach them, I will raise my voice loudly.
4. **Church members may want the pastor on call to take care of them.** Too much growth spreads the pastor too thinly. If my pastor can’t meet my needs 24/7, we have too many people in the church.
5. **Others are simply uncomfortable with any emphasis on numerical growth.** The pendulum has swung too far. For many years, many churches over-emphasized numerical growth, so much so that it seemed like the number was an end in itself. Today, many church leaders and members resist any emphasis on numerical growth, often to the detriment of Great Commission accountability.
6. **New people are different.** New Christians and non-Christians are particularly different from most longer-term church members. Their presence can make churches messy. Some members don’t like messy churches. Kind of like the Pharisees didn’t like Jesus relating to messy people.

I sense that God has some great things in store for us in 2019, yet we must be ready for His blessings. Many of those blessings come in the form of people; some are messy, but there is great joy and joy-filled satisfaction in caring for others. Let’s be like Jesus in loving each one, especially the messy ones even if they are not Greek.

 **BEST PRACTICE: Brought to you by Barry Daniel**

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Senior Adult Choir

Motivating and mobilizing our people to do significant ministry like singing is a joy and challenge. Here are some helpful hints that I have learned in my years of directing choirs over the years:

• Membership - open to members and nonmembers. It is also open to those with choral experience and to people that can’t sing. (I tell them come for the fellowship, fun, ministry, and the singing will happen eventually. – and it does in lots of cases.) I make lots of comments on simple levels of how to learn to sing.

• Outfits – We have a casual and a dressy one. That helps when we have concerts back-to-back, they have time to wash them. Also, I don’t pick the outfit, but I do approve it. (Best to form a committee of ladies of different sizes and ages and let them duke it out.) Generally, men don’t care – women do!

• Variety in Concert – have choir numbers, men’s quartet, ladies’ ensemble, hand bells, use an obbligato instrument like flute, oboe, violin if you have someone that plays well. The instrumentalist could also play a solo in between choir numbers to give the choir a rest. We have 2 ladies play a 4-hand piano prelude for our concerts. The change in pace, tempo, and musical texture keeps the concert interesting and refreshing. If I use orchestral accompaniment track, I also use our pianist on several numbers to change up the accompaniment.

• Use a seating chart. I seat by section SATB, height, strength of voice (Put weak singers in between two strong ones and stronger singers behind weak, quiet, or uncertain singers. I use color code for each section. I print their names out on card stock 8.5 X 11 and lay it in their chair before the last 3 rehearsals and at every concert. I keep in mind who I know will be out and rearrange accordingly. When they arrive, they know where to sit. We save the name tags and us the same ones. It does away with confusion and strengthen their sound.

• Preparation – rehearsals have a happy laid-back feeling with lots or laughter and fun BUT we sing from memory and each week a different song is to be memorized so there is planning and pace of the rehearsal that helps to accomplish memorizing a 45-minute program in 12 – 14 weeks. Part CD’s are prepared for the whole concert for each part. For example, the Soprano hears her part of each song louder on her CD and the same with the other voice parts. Some prepackaged musicals have these for sale but if you put together your own program you need to purchase an 8-track digital recorder and lay down the tracks, mix them and duplicate them yourself.

• Spiritual Emphasis – I always talk about the message of each piece of music as both a spiritual emphasis and a devotional time but also as part of what I want to teach the members about how to sing this piece. For example, I talk about the high point or most important part of the piece. It may be the past verse where everything gets louder and slows down or it may be in the middle when a special phrase that contains the gospel message is brought out in the music. In both situations, I challenge the singers to pray as they sing the words that the Holy Spirit would especially use their words and music to penetrate hearts with the gospel. It must penetrate out own hearts before it can penetrate others’ hearts. We pray a lot that God would make our words and music clear so that the Gospel would be heard and understood. And HE DOES!

• Opportunities to sing – God opens lots of opportunities to sing if you ask – nursing homes and retirement homes, senior and community center programs, prisons and jails, transition ministries for addicts or prisoners coming back into society. Shelters, outdoor concerts in city parks or even “flash mob” appearances. When we travel on choir tour lots of times we will be in a restaurant in our outfits and some customer or employee will say why don’t y’all sing for us and so we do – just sing it out a Capella! Afterwards on the bus I always say “Well y’all flashed them really good!” – and they say, “Brother Barry please don’t say it that way!”

• Tours – we always sing two concert seasons per year Christmas and Spring. In between these seasons we sing at area nursing homes. We sing a couple of choir numbers for them and then we sing old hymn favorites WITH the residents … and they love it. At Christmas, we will sing our program about or eight times in 2.5 weeks around town. In the spring, we go on a 4-day, 3-night choir tour a state or two away from home. We sing four to more six times on tour where God opens doors for us. When we return home, we do a homecoming concert and give testimonies of what God did on tour through concerts and ministry opportunities.

The senior adult choir is an excellent tool in senior adult ministry as we all know. Many churches have them and use them in worship services, for community outreach through concert ministry and for mission ministry away from home. It is a wonderful fellowship tool as the group enjoys being together, working together for a common goal of praising God together and being used by God to share His message as a group. senior adult choir unique for several reasons: most mission teams are not as large as a choir, people on different musical levels can all blend their abilities together to accomplish a larger impact that they could alone, and each member understands that their contribution is valuable to Kingdom work.

 **BEST PRACTICE: Brought to you by Dr. Wes Black**

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Senior Adult Council

Most of us would like to see more involvement in our activities for Boomers and older adults. Most of us would like to see older adults use their talents and creativity in planning and leading activities and events. Most of us would like for our folks to generate ideas and contribute suggestions for events and activities that would appeal to the most people and build stronger relationships among our groups.

As I tossed around these ideas, a thought came to me from my past. For years I served as a youth minister and looked at ways to involve more students in planning and leading youth ministry events and activities. Then I started using a youth ministry council, which included representative youth from each department and organization, a few key youth leaders, and at least one set of parents of youth. It worked great to hear from all elements of the ministry and plan activities that would involve youth and adults in key leadership roles.

So, I thought, why not take that format, and create a model that works with mature adults?

**The Ministry Council is born**

I appealed to all our departments and classes to submit names of folks who think creatively, can generate ideas, and have some level of leadership skills. I wanted to avoid using teachers and directors if possible, since they already have responsibilities for planning and leading activities for their own groups. This would be a ministry group that would help me plan and conduct events and activities for the overall ministry. From the names submitted, I sent invitations to those who would be likely members of the newly formed Legacy & Senior Adult Ministry Council and set planning dates.

I put together a notebook with explanations and illustrations of the purpose and plan for the group, calendars of activities, names of all on the members of the Council, and details about how we plan and conduct events. At our first meeting we had a lunch, got acquainted with other members of the group, and spent time talking about the concept and responsibilities of the Ministry Council. For most in the group, it was the first time they had ever been in such a group, but they were eager to get involved. For a few, they dropped out because of other responsibilities.

**Lead Teams**

One of the key components of the Ministry Council is the use of Lead Teams. The Ministry Council is the main sounding board for ideas, evaluating past events and putting new events on the calendar. Then the work of planning and leading the details of those events falls into the hands of Lead Teams.

A Lead Team starts with one leader, who either volunteers or is enlisted. This person acts as the chairperson for the team and chooses other members of the team. I suggest names and may help enlist, but the Lead Team leader does the main recruiting. I meet with the leader to set deadlines and expectations, establish budget, and assist with logistics such as clearing the events on the church calendar, and facilitating graphics needs beyond the capabilities of the team. Otherwise, the team meetings and all planning are conducted by the Lead Team under the leadership of the team leader. The leader and members of the Lead Team would ideally come from those outside the Ministry Council. This helps to involve others who may not be able to participate on the Ministry Council all the time, but they can invest time and energy for a period of time.

The Ministry Council meets every two months for planning, evaluation, and progress reports from the Lead Teams. The Lead Teams may be at various stages in their planning and there may be more than one Lead Team active at any given time.

Honestly, it took a while for the concept to settle in for many on the Ministry Council. But we have had several Lead Teams that functioned very well and have served as a model for future leaders. Out fall Legacy & Senior Adult Revival was planned and conducted by a Lead Team. I recruited the preacher and musicians, but all the logistics, publicity, greeters, and prayer strategy were carried out by a Lead Team. We currently have a Lead Team that is planning a Living Well conference for the fall. They have been meeting several times and have already worked out all the logistics, selected break out topics, enlisted leaders, and are now making plans for all publicity and ticket sales. I have met with the leader several times and facilitated some of the planning, but I am very pleased with the progress this team is making.

Many of us have used ad hoc committees and some have permanent committees for banquets, trips, newsletters, and other tasks. These could easily fit into a Lead Team model. I offer this experience we have had and encourage you to consider building a Ministry Council and Lead Team approach.

**CREATIVE IDEA: Brought to you by** **Peggy Fulghum**

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Adopt Granny

*Mission Dignity* is an outreach of the Southern Baptist Convention dedicated to helping retired pastors or their widows who are living at near poverty. Often these retired servants must decide between spending their scarce income for food or medicine or basic shelter and utilities. One in four recipients is a pastor’s widow age 85 or above.  In addition to major financial support, Johnson Ferry members wanted a personal touch for those who dedicated their lives to serve God. At our request, Mission Dignity sends us an annual list of those in our geographic location. We provide ongoing ministries to these individuals.

Every month an artist paints a picture which is turned into a card with inspirational message and sent to the Mission Dignity folks in Georgia. At Thanksgiving hand crocheted gifts are sent to each individual on our list. The items have ranged from lap robes to hats and scarves - all of which have been bathed in prayer for the recipient. Enclosed with the Thanksgiving gift is a request for permission to be adopted for Christmas. A list of gift ideas, favorite snacks, stores, color, and sizes are provided by the individual.

Our Adopt a Granny Tree is similar to the Angel Tree. Johnson Ferry families select a name and review their information. If possible, they hand deliver the gifts in time for Christmas. Some recipient gifts must be mailed but included in all are the gifts are words of love and prayer. Many adoptions have enjoyed years of connection that continues year-round.

My office is flooded each year with notes of appreciation from our members who were humbled by the unselfish and meager requests of the retired saints. It is the true Spirit of Christmas giving.

**CREATIVE IDEA: Brought to you by Scott Schulik**

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Mixing the Generations Produces Fruitful Results

I was greeted by the words “I thought that was the stupidest idea that you had ever come up with” on that Sunday morning. Not exactly my favorite way to start the day of worship. The words that came next are etched in my mind, “but, I want you to know just how much it meant to spend our Sunday School hour last week with Mobberly’s youth.” Tears streamed down Ms. Clara’s face as she shared how her faith had been bolstered and of the new hope, she gained for this next generation.

We have probably all heard the grumblings of “they’ve traded in our hymns for 7-11 choruses; there is no reverence in the ways kids dress today, or it’s all about the next generation.” Quickly, others get sucked into the downward spiral of such conversations, which only create a more significant divide in our churches. Rather than allowing divisions to grow, in a team effort between our student ministry and our seniors’ ministry, we sought after ways to breach the divide. It began with choosing a fall Sunday where we canceled Sr. Adult Sunday School to spend the morning with a group of 7-12th graders.

The morning began with a master teaching time as our Youth and Sr. Adult team shared about the unique characteristics of each generation, events that shaped their lives, and cultural values. It included hymns that connected with the seniors and songs of praise from our youth worship team. The highlight of the morning involved students and seniors pairing up to share discussions that began with softball topics such as “what was Christmas like growing up” or “what activities were/are you involved in” but quickly moved on to deeper spiritual conversations. During the hour, there would be time for two different pairings of students and seniors to allow for more discussions and eliminate the possibility of either getting stuck with someone that had very little to say.

We have now held Senior / Student Sunday three times and each time been encouraged by the wonderful feedback not only from the senior adults and students but also from their parents. “My kid came home talking all about the senior adult that they got to visit with this morning,” one of the parents shared. Translation: when I ask my kid, “what did you learn about this morning” they usually respond with one word “Jesus” or “nothing.” From our seniors, I heard, “they are so much more mature in their faith then I was” or “they are so bold to be sharing Christ in their schools and on mission trips.” Of all the lessons we’ve learned over these three years, the most important has been to cut way back on the introduction/master teaching time and allow much more time for the students and seniors to interact.

Over the past few years conversations have changed from “why are we doing things in conjunction with our Student Ministry?” to “when is the next time we are doing something with our students? “. Relationships have only deepened over the years as students have come to our Sr. Sunday School classes to share about mission trip experiences, they have joined together for summer game days, students visiting in the homes of our senior saints, and thru senior adults supporting students going on mission trips in a variety of ways.

Generational differences will always exist, but we can experience some real breakthroughs when we:

- Encourage people to step outside their comfort zone.

- Create avenues for generations to spend meaningful times of interaction with one another.

- Avoid looking at the cultural differences between us and focus on the faith in Christ that unites us.

I pray that yours will be a church that experiences inter-generational breakthroughs to the glory of our Savior.

 **Valuable Resources**

*A Vision for the Aging Church* by Houston and Parker

*Baby Boomers and Beyond* by Amy Hanson

*Boomer Nation* by Steve Gillon

*Caring for Aged Loved Ones* from Focus on the Family

*Catch the Age Wave* by Win Arn

*Church Shouldn’t Suck the Life Out of You* by Jim Minor

*Coffee with Mom* (Dementia) by Mike Glenn

*Deeper in 4 Grandparents and Parents, Too* by Lynda Freeman

*Don’t Take My Grief Away from Me* by Doug Manning

*Don’t Waste Your Life* by John Piper

*Equipping Grandparents* by Josh Mulvihill

*Everybody Always* by Bob Goff

*Extending Your Heritage* by J. Otis Ledbetter

*Extreme Grandparenting* by Tim, Darcy Kimmel

*Get off Your Bus* by John Bisagno and Dennis Swanberg

*Grandparenting: Strengthening Your Family*… by Josh Mulvihill

*Graying of the Flock* by James Knapp

*Great Lesson/ Grand Blessings* by Elmer Towns

*Halftime* by Bob Buford

*How to Talk about Jesus* by Sam Chan

*Humility: True Greatness* by C. J. Mahaney

*It Is Impossible to Spoil Grandchildren* by Lynda Freeman

*Joys of Successful Aging* by George Sweeting

*Keep It Simple* by Joe Calloway

*Live Long Die Short* by Roger Landry

*New Senior* by Win Arn

*Planting Shade Trees* by Dennis Swanberg

*Reimagining Retirement* by C J Cagle

*Seasons of a Leaders Life* by Jeff Iorg

*Senior Adult Ministry* by David Gallagher

*Spiritual Conversations in a Digital Age* by George Barna

*Strength Finder* by Tom Rath

*The Aging Brain* by Timothy Jennings

*The Art of Neighboring* by Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon

*The Heart of Grandparenting* by Ken Canfield

*The Hope Quotient* by Ray Johnston

*The Present Future* by Reggie McNeal

*The Rest of Your Life* by Patrick Morley

*Tribal Church* by Steve Stroope

*Walking with God* by Steve Gammon

*Working the Gray Zone* by Charles Oakes