

Churches must be creative to meet coming ‘Boomer wave’

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SAN ANTONIO (BNG)—Congregational coaches are warning churches against becoming so fixated on Millennials and other young people that they ignore the surging population of Baby Boomers already in their midst.

But those experts say most congregations simply aren’t ready to listen to that advice, especially when reaching out to potential members in their 50s, 60s and 70s doesn’t seem as exciting as ministering to younger generations.



Bill Wilson “A lot of churches say, ‘We have to reach young families,’ but they are surrounded by Boomers, not young families,” said Bill Wilson, director of the [Center for Healthy Churches](#), a North Carolina-based ministry that provides consulting and coaching services for American churches.

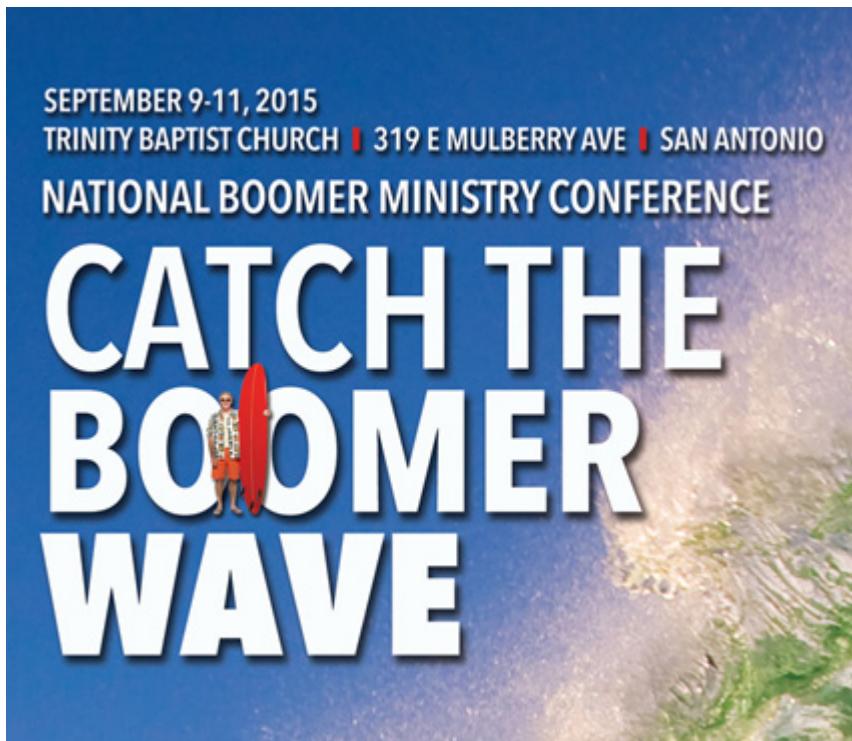
“Elementary schools might be closing around them while early retiring Boomers are surrounding them, and they don’t pay attention to them.”

And that’s likely to become an increasingly common challenge for churches, as Wilson and others who track church trends anticipate the coming of a “Boomer wave.”

Some groups are taking steps to help congregations with a demographic surge created by a generation turning 65 at nearly 10,000 people a day.

On Sept. 9-11, the Baptist General Convention of Texas' adult discipleship team will offer its 4th annual ["Catch the Boomer Wave"](#) National Boomer Ministry Conference at Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio to address how to minister to Boomers effectively.

Participants will learn Boomers require a very intentional approach to ministry. In other words, inviting them to church for coffee, conversation and crafts isn't enough.



"Rather than be ministered to, Boomers have a great desire to make an impact in the second half of their lives," said Keith Lowry, adult education consultant and Boomer ministry specialist for Texas Baptists.

That means "ministry with Boomers must move in an entirely different direction than traditional senior-adult ministries have in the past," he added.

Boomers' dissatisfaction with most senior-adult ministries can be measured in their absence and departure from the church, said Eddie Hammett, an

author, congregational consultant and president of North Carolina-based [Transforming Solutions](#).

“Boomers often feel overworked, under-challenged and ignored by most churches,” Hammett said in an email.



Eddie HammettDiscussions about the so-called “nones” and “dones” often focus on those religiously unaffiliated groups as young people, including Millennials. And many are, but not all.

“I further believe that many of the ‘nones’ and ‘dones’ and churchless believers are from the Boomer generation, or they will be, if something significant is not done soon in churches and denominations,” said Hammett the author of *Reaching People Under 30 While Keeping People Over 60*, due for release in October.

Churches that make themselves welcoming places for Boomers stand to enjoy renewal if they become entrepreneurial in ministry design, focus and mission, he said. Those that don’t embrace this change are likely to watch as other churches grow.

“Boomers value faith and tradition but are seeking pathways to significance in faith, relationship and engagement during the second half of life,” Hammett said.

Wilson often tells clients it’s unlikely most churches will heed the warnings

about the coming and needs of Boomers.

Not as 'glamorous'

"It's not as glamorous" to work with Boomers as it is with younger people, he said.

"There will be at least one significant church in every community that will recognize this and ride the Boomer wave and do well. Why not you?"

Some experts point to good news for churches that have been focusing a lot of energy on attracting young people: Millennials and Boomers want many of the same things from churches.

Boomers, especially in retirement, are known for their thirst for fulfillment and significance. And churches should have a leg up on providing it to them.

"That's what we do," Wilson said. "We provide significance."

Neither group wants to do anything that seems like wasting time, he said. They don't want busy work. They want activity full of meaning and purpose.

"Churches that are more missionally focused and less programmatically driven will appeal to both Millennials and Boomers," Wilson said.

Be creative

But those churches also will have to be creative. Boomers often have grandchildren visiting on weekends, travel to see their own kids or may have season tickets to college or professional sports. Or they may be caring for aging parents.

That means they may be in church only 20 to 25 Sundays a year, he said.

"It takes a lot more creativity than saying, 'We are going to schedule adult

senior events,'" he said.

Leah Reynolds of Texas Baptist Communications contributed to this report.