

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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The Master Trend

The press is filled with stories on the aging of the baby boom generation. In late November 2005 *Newsweek* devoted an entire issue to the coming silver tsunami. The cover shouted "Ready or Not, Boomers Turn 60." The lead article explained, "The generation that vowed to stay forever young is coming up on a major milestone. But for the 3.4 million Americans who were born in 1946, retirement is a distant prospect, and life still holds plenty of promise and

surprises. They've been hippies and yuppies; now it's the time of the 'abbies': aging baby boomers".

Forty years ago none of the baby boomers thought they would ever be an abbie. Sixty-two years old? No way! Of course, four decades ago Paul McCartney wondered whether he would be needed when he was sixty-four, and so did other boomers, but at the time the parents of the boomers were not even in their sixties.

It is different now. Boomers are beginning to recognize that life is really very short. Their own parents have aged, and many have died, leaving them as the elders in the family, and next in line to depart this world. Sobering thoughts for people who once upon a time did not trust anyone over thirty.

Not too surprisingly, however, boomers continue to believe that death is a long way off, as is old age. Younger boomers, called the trailing edge, think old age begins around seventy years old, while

older boomers, the leading edge, think old age begins at seventy-four. The polling company, Yankelovich Partners, discovered that boomers defined "old age" as "starting three years after the average American was dead", leading Walker Smith, president of Yankelovich Partners, to comment, "Baby boomers literally think they're going to die before they get old."

This is the master trend impacting baby boomers, that is, their desire to stay young and delay the aging process. Author Gail Sheehy says, "In the space of a single generation, Boomers have fundamentally altered the shape of the adult life cycle. By taking longer to grow up and delaying marriage, parenting and retirement, they have shifted all

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The adult life cycle has changed.

Boomers desire to stay young — forever!

the stages of adulthood ahead by 10 to 15 years.” Dr. Terry Grosman, operator of a Denver anti-aging clinic, explains boomer thinking in a more dramatic way: “As an official member of the boomer generation, I do not believe it was intended for us to die. We were special right from the get-go — dying wasn't part of our script.”

The boomer desire to stay forever young is making an impact in areas as diverse as medicine and skiing. Presbyopia, a condition that requires reading glasses, is a common issue for aging boomers affecting nearly 140 million people over forty-five years of age. But baby boomers are ditching glasses for surgery. Aging boomers are using LASIK surgery as the major option to create sharper vision, but contact lenses, and lens implants are also popular alternatives. For those who still prefer glasses, progressive bifocal lenses eliminate the line in the glass found in older bifocals.

To support the boomer vision of ageless youth, Americans spend an average of six billion a year on substances like ginkgo biloba and human growth hormone, mostly obtained from anti-aging clinics. New fitness clubs with names like Nifty After Fifty (Los Angeles, California), Healthfit (Needham, Massachusetts), and FitWright (Dedham, Massachusetts) have started to serve the mature boomer generation. They offer yoga, tai chi, and Pilates classes, as well as traditional weight training and treadmills. Instead of metal weights, however, Nifty After Fifty uses air pressure-driven equipment.

Traditional fitness clubs, such as Gold's Gym, are targeting aging boomers by offering senior programming and using older people in their

advertising. Over one-third of the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association's more than 4,000 clubs reported the number of members over the age of fifty-five grew from 7.3 million to 7.9 million between 2000 and 2005.

In a nod to their youthful attitude, ski resorts are taming down bumps and slopes in an effort to attract older boomers. For the 2005 season a Vail, Colorado resort flattened 1,600 acres to make it easier on older boomers who still like to shred the slopes. The reason? Thirty-one percent of its skiers were over forty-five years old.

Vail even groomed one-half of its expert runs in an effort to make them comfortable for boomers to ski. In the past, some ski resorts offered free skiing to those over seventy years old, but with the increased health and wealth of the boomers, most resorts are now eliminating such offers.

What impact will this master trend have on your adult seniors' ministry? How will your church respond to the thousands of aging baby boomers? What are your plans to win them to Christ?



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