

## A Senior Moment

In the early 1980s, some visionary church planters started aiming at young adults. People like Rick Warren in Southern California set out to plant churches that would attract those Baby Boomers who had left their parents' churches. Warren describes his process in his book *The Purpose-Driven Church*. First, he located the fastest-growing county in the United States: Orange County, California – primarily a suburban haven for young professionals. Then he spent long months doing surveys of that county's residents and constructed a model of his target demographic: young, affluent, tech-savvy, highly-motivated professionals who listen to rock music, enjoy cappuccinos, and have a sports car, plus a minivan for transporting two pampered children. Warren designed his church for that target.

The result is history. Warren's Saddleback Valley Community Church now has somewhere between three oodles and four gazillion members. Tens of thousands of lives have been, and continue to be, transformed there. Dozens of new churches have been started and thousands of other pastors, including yours truly, have at some time in their lives tried to follow this model, only to discover that, sadly, we are not Rick Warren.

But every model has its weaknesses. As powerful and effective as Warren's strategy has been, it was a strategy aimed at one and only one age demographic. That inevitably meant ignoring other generations. One long-term result of this strategy is that now, thirty years later, the children of those original young adults are leaving. Why would they stay in churches designed exclusively for their parents? (By the way, a new generation of church planting strategists is working desperately to design the definitive new church model to attract the Millennial generation. No luck yet. The only consistent feature of the Millennial generation that they've found is that Millennials really, *really* hate being treated as a homogeneous target demographic.)

What if we did things differently? What if, instead of separating the generations, we brought them together? What if we did not put all the youthful energy in one room and all the wisdom in another? What if our youth programs were less about creating a separate space for teenagers and more about integrating those teens into the whole life of the church? What if we created times and spaces for our senior adults to share what they have learned with the rest of us? What if we stopped being demographics and started being family?

This month, in our newsletter, we are focusing on senior adults. This is partly target demographics. We have a lot of seniors in our congregation already, and it is one of the fastest growing age groups in the country. But we are not setting out to create a church for seniors. Rather, we are trying to meet the needs and claim the gifts of this important and integral part of our church as a whole. We are trying to listen to some of the voices that our youth-driven society tends to drown out. This month, listen to someone who knows more than you do. Chances are, that person is a senior.