

21st Century Church Growth
by Bob Chism, CAM

What do unsustainable debt, social longevity disconnect, dual youth, New-Old focus, and individual lay ministry have in common? They each represent a 21st century church growth opportunities.

Unsustainable debt grips our Nation along with many Americans. The national personal stress index is at 80%; 53% of Christians have not given to their Church in the last month; Church giving has not exceeded 3% as a portion of income in the past 40 years; 70% of Americans live from pay check to paycheck; the average family has to use a credit card to pay a \$1,500 unexpected bill & is three years away from a planned debt repayment plan; 37% of all divorces are derived from financial situations; 70% of Americans die without a will or trust and nearly half (46%) of all Americans have less than \$10,000 saved for retirement. While the teaching of financial literacy holds the answer, church leaders fail to teach lifetime and eternal stewardship (Finances God's Way, Estate Planning & Finishing Well) & Unbeliever Side Doors Evangelism

Life expectancy increased by 30 years between 1900 and 2000. In his book, **The Third Age: Six Principles for Personal Growth and Rejuvenation after Forty**, Dr William Sadler calls this a 30 year bonus and uses The Third Age to signify a new period not possible for previous generations. The new life course has the following frame work with each age having 20-25 years in a given lifespan and the particular focus outlined here:

Years	Stage	Focus
20-25	Preparation:	The first age is a time for growing up.
40-50	Achievement:	The second age is a time of establishment.
60-75	Fulfillment:	The third age is a time of a more caring life.
80-100	Completion:	The fourth age is a time of integration.

According to Third Age Partners, the third age challenge lies in the response-ability to give back, to find the best way to contribute our money, talent, and time to address the needs of community and world.

Additional challenges include social longevity disconnect (an age biased society and a population segment with 30 bonus years of discretionary time and sweet spots requiring intentional nurturing, equipping and placement) and the predominant church growth preference youth and institutional lay ministry.

The silver bullet strategies to these challenge include creative staffing with marginalized third agers; investment in new revenue producing positions; stewardship training for life's money areas (taxes, giving, saving, avoiding

debt, investing, and spending) as well as equipping in depth lay member involvement through unbeliever heartbeat “SIDE DOORS” ministries:

Staff Restructure

- Shift to a dual Youth & New-Old Orientation as well as an INDIVIDUAL Lay Ministry Philosophy
- Invest in Adult Ministry, Business Manager, & Development Positions
- Seek Third Age Lay Ministry Director, Part-timers & Volunteers

Teach Lifetime and Eternal Stewardship (Finances God’s Way, Estate Planning & Finishing Well) & Unbeliever Side Doors Evangelism

Ward Tanneberg, President & Executive Director of CASA (Christian Association Serving Adults) Network recommends greater investment in training for adult ministry pastors and lay leaders ... who have the task of motivating, encouraging, teaching, and caring for the adults in your church family with little or no special training for the task.

Church Leadership needs to (1) embrace a dual youth & New-Old orientation as well as an INDIVIDUAL lay ministry; (2) create new revenue source positions, more responsive to third agers needs, plus fiscal control methods; and (3) harness third age adults in depth involvement with unbeliever lives through heart beat ministry, volunteer management and intentional adult nurturing.