

# The Pulse of United Methodist Baby Boomers

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## Who was surveyed?

About 500 United Methodist District Superintendents were asked to provide the names of two or three churches in their districts that were doing vital ministry with Boomers (adults born between 1946 and 1964). From the list received, we mailed surveys to 250 churches in each of the five jurisdictions: North Central, Northeastern, South Central, Southeastern, and Western. United Methodist churches were selected randomly from each annual conference, but with a focus on diverse representation: rural/urban/small town, large/small membership, race/ethnicity. Of the 2500 surveys mailed, approximately 800 were completed and returned. Close to 90 surveys were ruled invalid because they were completed by adults who were not born 1946-64 (and therefore represented other generations) or the surveys contained insufficient data. As a result, *the following information is obtained from 709 United Methodist Boomer surveys*. The original survey follows page 19 at the end of this booklet.

## Why were they surveyed?

In part because of their large numbers, Boomers have had a great impact on our society and on the church. Currently, many Boomers are approaching the peak years of their careers. While some are retiring, others are starting a new career; still others are searching for their niche in the world. They assume leadership roles in the community, business and industry, technology, education, and the church. As a generation, they have charted new courses and longed to make a positive contribution to the world.



We surveyed United Methodist Boomers to discern what they are thinking about their faith, religion, and spirituality. In addition, we sought their views about life, world events, and the future. We want to know something about the yearnings of their hearts. As a result, the General Board of Discipleship seeks to provide resources to meet the faith needs of aging Boomers. It is our desire to help Boomers grow as Christian disciples for the transformation of the world.

## What did we learn?

In analyzing the United Methodist Boomers' completed surveys, we obtained many statistics, numbers, and percentages. We found out:

- What events had the greatest impact on UM Boomers' lives and why;
- How UM Boomers define and view their generation;
- What religious beliefs UM Boomers hold and how they live these beliefs in their daily lives
- What feelings and concerns UM Boomers have about their futures and the futures of their children;
- What UM Boomers feel is most important to teach their children;
- Current UM Boomer financial and societal concerns, and their projections for the future;
- How satisfied UM Boomers are with their lives;
- How UM Boomers view aging and their fears about growing older;
- When UM Boomers plan to retire and what they plan to do in their retirement;
- UM Boomer views on social, political, and moral issues.

## Profile of the respondents

The survey respondents were divided into three categories: gender; age (early Boomers, born between 1946 and 1954, and late Boomers, born between 1955 and 1964); and by the five jurisdictions (North Central, Northeast, South Central, Southeast, and West). About 41% of the respondents are male and 59% are female. Although the survey was sent to churches of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, 97% of the respondents are native to the U.S., and 95% are Caucasian.

## Education

On average, 36% of the respondents are college graduates, and 30% completed graduate school. Of the females, 36% graduated from college, and 25% completed graduate school. Of the males, 37% graduated from college, and 37% completed grad school. More late UM Boomers graduated from college (40%) than early UM Boomers (33%). However, more early UM Boomers (33%) completed graduate school than did late UM Boomers (27%).

## Income

Annual household income for the respondents										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC*	NE*	SC*	SE*	W*
\$35-49,999	18%	17%	18%	19%	17%	20%	15%	24%	12%	18%
\$50-74,999	29%	32%	27%	27%	31%	24%	30%	40%	25%	27%
\$75-100,000	23%	24%	23%	20%	26%	25%	25%	18%	25%	20%
\$100,000+	15%	16%	14%	18%	12%	15%	14%	4%	23%	19%

\*NC = North Central Jurisdiction; NE = Northeastern Jurisdiction; SC = South Central Jurisdiction; SE = Southeastern Jurisdiction; W = Western Jurisdiction

## Marriage

Nearly 72% of the UM Boomers surveyed indicated that they are married and never divorced; 5% are divorced; 2% are widowed; 5% are single and have never married; 16% are married again. Less than 1% of UM Boomers are living together without the benefit of a marriage certificate.

## Parenting

Most UM Boomers are parents (82%) and some are grandparents (13% of the early Boomers and 1% of the late Boomers). UM Boomers are very definite about the values they want to impart to their children—55% indicated that teaching core values is their most important concern as they raise their children. Honesty, integrity, respect, and compassion for others, love of God and family, and personal responsibility rank highest on the list of values. Next to core values, helping children develop a positive self-image is the next concern (20%); then modeling healthy relationships (7%); and spending enough time with their children (5%). UM Boomers also emphasize to their children the “Golden Rule.” Above all, the UM Boomer parents surveyed desire that their children have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and believe in him as Lord and Savior of their lives.

## Religious Beliefs

Of the United Methodist Boomers born between 1946 and 1954, 91% count themselves as believers and 6% say they are seekers. Of respondents born between 1955 and 1964, 94% are believers and 4% are seekers. Approximately 1% in each of these groups identify themselves as agnostic or atheist. Ninety-four percent of females and 91% of males identify themselves as believers.

In what do these Boomers believe? We gave them several choices, and they could choose more than one response. They believe in:

- **God as the Creator** (both early and late Boomers agree at 97%)
- **Jesus Christ as Lord & Savior** (early Boomers 93%; late Boomers 92%)
- **Prayer** (early Boomers 93%; late Boomers 95%)
- **Angels** (early Boomers 65%; late Boomers 70%)
- **The acceptance of all persons into heaven** (early Boomers 11%; late Boomers 9%)
- **The acceptance of only the saved into heaven** (early Boomers 50%; late Boomers 53%)
- **The church as the best place to grow in faith** (both age groups agree at 74%)

While only 10% of United Methodist Boomers surveyed believe that “all people will go to heaven,” it is interesting to note that only about 50% believe that “only the saved will go to heaven.”

Weekly worship is the practice of 90% of United Methodist Boomer respondents, and 8% worship at least twice a month. These percentages do not vary by gender or age group.

## Political Stance

Of the responding United Methodist Boomers, 49% see themselves as moderates; 34% say they are conservative; and 11% identify themselves as liberal.

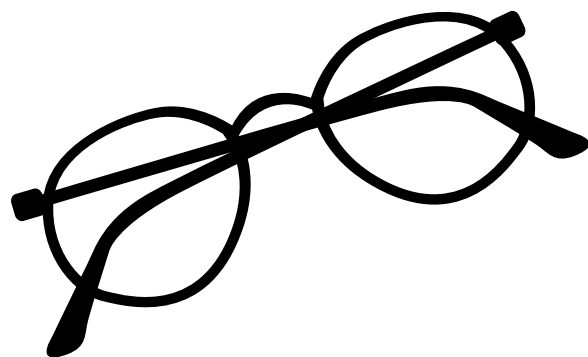
## How do UM Boomers view their generation?

We gave survey participants several choices. Here is what they think of their generation as a whole:

- Matured by experience and ready to lead: 30%
- Hypocritical: 23%
- Giving and caring: 14%
- Greedy and selfish: 7%
- Other: 22%

In the “other category,” many describe their generation as “lost and confused,” “still searching,” “looking for purpose and meaning in life,” “searching for the truth and seeking God.” Others see themselves as “unfulfilled, frustrated, and disenchanting”; “materialistic”; “self-centered or self-absorbed”; “cynical and stressed”; “overwhelmed and overworked or workaholics”; “in a hurry to experience it all.”

As you’ve read, the United Methodist Boomers surveyed look rather disdainfully at their generation. Only 44% view their generation in positive terms. Yet, 95% of all Boomers surveyed are satisfied with their lives.



## What do UM Boomers expect & plan for the next 10 years?

Survey participants were asked to pick one of the following words to describe how they feel when they think about the next ten years. Four in five Boomers expressed a positive outlook about the future. Here’s the breakdown by gender, age, and jurisdiction.

When you think about the next ten years, how do you feel?										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Hopeful	56%	50%	60%	55%	56%	55%	56%	56%	56%	57%
Confident	26%	33%	22%	27%	26%	32%	26%	24%	23%	27%
Anxious	14%	14%	14%	14%	15%	12%	14%	13%	17%	17%
Fearful	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%	0%
Apathetic	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%



Participants were asked to choose one answer to the question: ***“As you think about the next 10 years, which of the following will be society’s greatest economic concern?”***

Society’s Greatest Economic Concern										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Paying for Social Security & Medicare	22%	21%	22%	23%	21%	21%	28%	19%	19%	19%
Balancing federal budget	10%	10%	9%	7%	12%	10%	9%	12%	11%	6%
Healthcare costs for a growing older adult population	36%	32%	39%	38%	35%	37%	31%	38%	44%	27%
Growing gap between rich & poor	24%	27%	22%	24%	23%	24%	24%	22%	17%	39%
Other	7%	9%	6%	7%	8%	6%	8%	10%	5%	7%

“Other” responses include: reducing taxes, teaching people to live within their means, and ending the need for welfare by helping those who depend on those benefits to help themselves.

Survey participants were asked to pick one answer to the question: *“As you think about the next ten years, which of the following will be society’s greatest social concern?”*

Society's Greatest Social Concern										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Fighting racism, sexism, & ageism	16%	15%	17%	16%	16%	17%	17%	18%	16%	10%
Stopping violence related to crime & drugs	39%	37%	40%	37%	41%	41%	37%	38%	41%	40%
Caring for the homeless & the mentally ill	3%	3%	3%	4%	2%	2%	4%	0%	4%	5%
Raising a generation of fatherless children	25%	28%	23%	25%	25%	24%	24%	30%	24%	23%
Other	15%	17%	14%	15%	15%	14%	16%	13%	15%	20%

“Other” responses include: finding a set of core values that the population can agree upon and abide by; getting along with others; being accountable for oneself and one’s neighbor; and becoming a “nation under God” again.



Boomers were asked: *“As you think about the next ten years, what is your greatest personal financial concern?”* Here’s what we discovered.

Personal Financial Concern										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Paying for my child’s college education	38%	38%	38%	34%	43%	38%	42%	34%	37%	40%
Supporting my aging parent’s needs	3%	4%	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%	2%	5%	2%
Paying for the cost of my divorce	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Saving for retirement	44%	43%	44%	49%	38%	45%	42%	46%	43%	45%
Paying off my mortgage	5%	5%	4%	4%	6%	5%	3%	6%	7%	2%
Other	8%	8%	9%	8%	9%	7%	9%	10%	8%	8%

Some of the “other” *personal financial* concerns are: paying off debts and just making ends meet. Overall, in the areas of the country’s economic concerns, their personal financial concerns, and societal concerns, Boomers’ major concerns are: ■ Addressing escalating healthcare costs ■ Stopping the violence in our society ■ Saving for retirement

## Future accomplishments

Our survey participants had definite ideas on what they would like to accomplish in the next 10 years. UM Boomers strive to be successful spouses and parents. Raising and equipping their children to be good, hard-working, independent, responsible young adults ranked near the top of the wish list, as did making sure that children get through college. Planning for a retirement free from financial worry is important to the respondents. Renewing or continuing to strengthen marital relationships is important to UM Boomers whose children will be out on their own. Serving God through church and community work is a great wish for many. UM Boomers are very interested in and committed to developing a closer relationship with God and discerning God’s will for the rest of their lives. Other future endeavors include: writing a book, learning to play the saxophone, hiking the Appalachian Trail, running the Boston Marathon, and buying a small orchard. Boomers do have dreams!



## Meaning in life today

When asked to choose what gives the most meaning to their lives, survey respondents said:

What gives you the most meaning in life?										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Community Service	1%	2%	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	1%
Religion/Spirituality	33%	27%	36%	34%	31%	32%	31%	32%	36%	33%
Family	50%	55%	47%	46%	54%	50%	57%	49%	49%	46%
Work	2%	3%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%	3%	2%	2%
Friendships/ Relationships	9%	8%	10%	12%	7%	10%	7%	8%	11%	13%
Other	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	1%	4%	4%	2%	4%

The respondents who checked “other” believe that these five categories cannot be separated, so they stated their feelings or wrote “all of the above” in the space for a specific response.

## UM Boomers speak out about their own aging

Contrary to the results of some polls relating to aging Boomers, United Methodist Boomers surveyed are not worried about aging and plan to grow older gracefully.

When asked if they exercise regularly (3 times per week) and eat with good nutrition in mind, 50% of Boomers say usually, 15% say always, 32% say rarely, and 2% say never. We asked Boomers to choose one of these descriptions of how they view their own aging. Here are the results.

How do you view your own aging?										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
I plan to fight growing older.	6%	5%	6%	5%	6%	8%	4%	7%	6%	1%
I plan to deny I am growing older.	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%
I plan to relax and not worry about my aging.	39%	47%	33%	32%	46%	45%	39%	37%	37%	33%
I plan to reinvent my life during my retirement years.	11%	11%	12%	17%	6%	9%	9%	18%	10%	12%
I plan to grow older gracefully.	37%	36%	40%	39%	34%	32%	39%	30%	39%	46%
Other	6%	4%	7%	5%	7%	3%	7%	7%	7%	4%

Most respondents who wrote in specific responses say that they want to be “mentally and physically healthy and active” as they age. They say they will grow in wisdom by cherishing learning opportunities and “every gray hair and wrinkle.”



Here are survey participants’ answers to the question:

***“How do you want to be identified as you grow older and reach retirement years?”***

Identification as a Senior Citizen										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Elder	7%	9%	4%	8%	5%	6%	8%	7%	2%	14%
Mature Adult	31%	30%	32%	33%	29%	33%	37%	28%	32%	18%
Older Adult	18%	18%	15%	15%	21%	15%	37%	28%	32%	18%
Senior Citizen	9%	8%	9%	11%	7%	11%	10%	6%	7%	7%
Adult	24%	25%	23%	21%	27%	22%	23%	24%	25%	30%
Other	10%	11%	9%	10%	10%	11%	8%	10%	10%	14%

From the approximately 10% of UM Boomers who marked “other” come the following suggestions: “Senior Adult,” “Christian,” “by my name,” and “oh no, not another label!” Seriously, the majority did not care to have an official name for their group as they retire.

UM Boomers were asked to choose **two** of the following *fears about growing older*:

Fears about Growing Older										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Not having enough money to live on	23%	21%	25%	25%	22%	21%	19%	29%	25%	24%
Losing sense of purpose	14%	14%	13%	15%	12%	12%	14%	15%	15%	10%
Being a burden to family	19%	21%	17%	18%	19%	11%	24%	18%	22%	16%
Not leaving my children an inheritance	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Living in a nursing home	9%	10%	8%	8%	10%	14%	6%	10%	5%	12%
Dying	3%	2%	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%	0%	4%
Failing health	42%	46%	40%	42%	43%	46%	43%	39%	39%	47%
Death of spouse	24%	26%	23%	23%	26%	26%	29%	21%	22%	22%
Losing my independence	27%	23%	30%	28%	27%	28%	28%	23%	27%	31%
Memory loss	15%	12%	18%	15%	15%	13%	14%	18%	15%	20%
Other	4%	3%	4%	3%	5%	5%	2%	4%	7%	0%

Other responses that Boomers gave as fears of growing older are “growing old alone” (not having married or had children); “not recognizing God’s purpose for my life”; “death of parents or of a child”; and “having regrets about what I should have done but didn’t.”



Eighty-three percent of UM Boomers plan to retire; only 15% say they will not retire. Most will be retired by age 70. Here is how the results break down by gender, age, and jurisdiction.

Do you plan to retire?										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	83%	86%	81%	83%	84%	92%	78%	77%	86%	81%
No	15%	14%	15%	15%	14%	5%	21%	22%	11%	13%

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At what age do you plan to retire?										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Before age 54	7%	5%	8%	9%	8%	10%	4%	5%	7%	10%
By age 60	38%	38%	38%	40%	37%	39%	39%	34%	37%	43%
By age 65	64%	67%	62%	64%	64%	66%	65%	60%	64%	65%
By age 70	73%	80%	63%	74%	73%	77%	72%	71%	73%	72%



**What do retired United Methodist Boomers plan to do after their working years are over?**

Travel and community service ranked high. We asked that they check all choices that apply.

When I retire, I plan to:										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Travel	78%	78%	78%	77%	79%	82%	75%	79%	74%	84%
Learn a new skill	45%	41%	47%	49%	40%	48%	39%	45%	43%	53%
Start a new career	11%	14%	9%	12%	10%	8%	10%	15%	12%	11%
Move closer to my family	8%	7%	8%	9%	6%	6%	8%	9%	7%	8%
Grow spiritually	65%	58%	70%	69%	61%	57%	65%	65%	67%	75%
Spend more time with my family	47%	42%	51%	46%	48%	50%	49%	42%	45%	52%
Continue working even during retirement	35%	43%	29%	38%	31%	35%	29%	39%	34%	42%
Move to another climate for my health	10%	11%	9%	12%	8%	14%	13%	7%	5%	10%
Perform community service	75%	72%	77%	75%	74%	77%	74%	74%	67%	89%
Other	10%	12%	9%	9%	12%	10%	11%	10%	8%	12%

Top three “other” responses: “play golf,” “perform more church work,” “spend time with and spoil grandchildren.”

## Life Experiences

Survey participants were asked to check all of the following that they had experienced.

Marriage . . . . .	94%	Death of a spouse . . . . .	3%
Death of a parent . . . . .	43%	Acute illness (cancer, stroke, etc.) . . . . .	7%
Military service. . . . .	11%	Physical or sexual abuse . . . . .	10%
“Born again” . . . . .	33%	Remarriage . . . . .	18%
Chronic illness (arthritis, hearing loss, etc.) .	13%	Abortion . . . . .	8%
Tried illegal drugs. . . . .	28%	Career change . . . . .	53%
Religious experience/conversion. . . . .	44%	Parent in a blended family . . . . .	11%
Divorce . . . . .	22%	Parent(s) living with you . . . . .	5%
Death of a child . . . . .	3%	Caring for aging parent(s) . . . . .	20%
Job loss. . . . .	26%	First in family to graduate from college. . . .	27%

Of these life experiences, the ones that had the greatest impact on the lives of respondents are shown in the chart below:

Greatest Impact on Life										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Marriage	34%	42%	28%	33%	34%	35%	37%	33%	26%	36%
Divorce	7%	5%	8%	25%	19%	7%	4%	7%	9%	11%
Death of a parent	9%	8%	11%	10%	9%	12%	11%	10%	6%	6%
Religious experience or conversion/ “born again” *	28%	27%	29%	27%	30%	24%	26%	33%	31%	31%
Career change	53%	2%	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%	57%	57%	46%
Tried illegal drugs	28%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	27%	24%	40%

\*For this section “born again” and religious experience or conversion were combined.

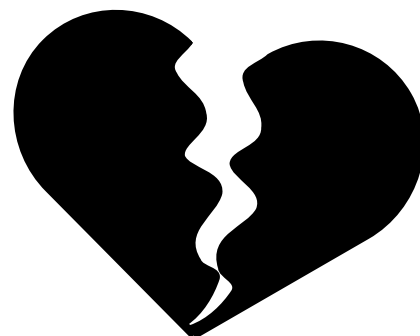
Why did these life experiences have a great impact on UM Boomers? We did receive a few “why not?” responses but overall, survey participants were helpful in their responses:

### Impact of marriage

Marriage fulfilled a need; brought the joy of children; often one spouse led the other to Christ; brought the experience of joint decision-making and consideration of another person; brought new opportunities and experiences; expanded horizons; brought the experience of real “true love”; “a path from self to other to creation of another”; recognized the work that a relationship needs; makes one disciplined and responsible; support and acceptance by another person.

### Impact of divorce

Many UM Boomers said divorce was the “loss of a dream.” Some worried that their children would not be raised in a two-parent household. Noncustodial parents expressed deep concern about not seeing their children every day. Being separated from children and not seeing or being a part of their development is the biggest loss.



### Impact of death of a parent

This experience is for many UM Boomers “the loss of a best friend.” For those who experienced loss of a parent at an early age, an added burden was the increased responsibility in the home, i.e., caring for younger siblings, cooking, cleaning. When the loss came at a time of a new marriage or birth of a child, a greater sense of loss was felt due to the inability to have the parent share in the experience. A parent’s death makes one aware of one’s own mortality and sometimes causes fear of inheriting the same illness. There may be the added responsibility of caring for the remaining parent. Some who witnessed the death felt God’s presence in a very real way. Some felt the blessing of being cared for by such a loving parent. Some UM Boomers worry that maybe a parent didn’t know how much he/she was loved.

### Impact of religious experience or conversion/“born again”

Many United Methodist Boomers gained “peace and serenity” by surrendering their lives to God; feelings of inner strength and calm; “my relationship with Christ influences all of my decisions and choices in life.”

## Boomers speak out on social issues

We asked survey participants to answer *yes* or *no* to these statements affecting society today and in the future.

I will receive Social Security benefits when I retire.										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	64%	62%	65%	69%	59%	61%	70%	54%	67%	67%
No	34%	36%	32%	28%	39%	34%	27%	46%	31%	29%

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I will have a pension when I retire.

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	71 %	79 %	65 %	74 %	68 %	72 %	73 %	69 %	71 %	64 %
No	28 %	21 %	33 %	25 %	31 %	27 %	25 %	29 %	27 %	36 %

I am personally saving for my retirement.

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	85 %	86 %	81 %	86 %	85 %	90 %	82 %	81 %	88 %	88 %
No	14 %	14 %	15 %	13 %	13 %	8 %	17 %	19 %	11 %	12 %

My parents are/were better off financially than I.

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	34 %	29 %	37 %	32 %	35 %	32 %	33 %	35 %	33 %	41 %
No	64 %	70 %	61 %	66 %	63 %	66 %	64 %	64 %	67 %	59 %

Organized religion is in touch with my needs.

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	78 %	77 %	78 %	76 %	80 %	81 %	77 %	77 %	79 %	71 %
No	18 %	21 %	16 %	19 %	17 %	15 %	18 %	20 %	18 %	22 %

Organized religion is "big business" and money.

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	28 %	34 %	22 %	30 %	24 %	24 %	21 %	35 %	37 %	19 %
No	69 %	64 %	72 %	65 %	72 %	70 %	76 %	60 %	61 %	80 %

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**The government is doing a good job running this country.**

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	29%	35%	25%	25%	30%	35%	26%	29%	26%	29%
No	67%	63%	70%	66%	68%	61%	71%	67%	70%	65%

**The government should end Affirmative Action.**

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	52%	58%	48%	49%	55%	43%	52%	59%	63%	39%
No	39%	39%	40%	42%	37%	43%*	42%	35%	33%	47%*

*\*Note: 14% did not respond to this statement.*

**There is more violence in my community now than 3 years ago.**

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	65%	61%	67%	64%	65%	59%	58%	66%	68%	80%
No	34%	37%	31%	34%	33%	39%	39%	32%	31%	18%

**My family enjoys a close relationship.**

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	93%	91%	93%	94%	91%	95%	92%	91%	94%	88%
No	7%	8%	7%	6%	8%	5%	7%	8%	6%	11%

**I am committed to having a long-term relationship with my spouse.**

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	92%	95%	90%	91%	92%	94%	92%	90%	92%	90%
No	3%	1%	4%	4%	3%	3%	4%	3%	2%	5%
Unsure	5%	4%	6%	5%	5%	4%	4%	7%	6%	5%

The Pulse of United Methodist Baby Boomers

I am satisfied with my career.										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	76%	79%	75%	77%	75%	79%	79%	76%	72%	76%
No	22%	21%	23%	20%	23%	20%	20%	21%	25%	23%

I am satisfied with my faith.										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	83%	78%	87%	86%	81%	86%	84%	81%	80%	87%
No	16%	21%	13%	14%	19%	14%	15%	19%	19%	13%

The criminal justice system is fair.										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	34%	41%	29%	29%	38%	32%	33%	38%	32%	36%
No	64%	57%	68%	67%	59%	61%	65%	59%	67%	64%

I believe in capital punishment.										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	62%	71%	54%	60%	63%	54%	61%	66%	71%	51%
No	35%	27%	40%	36%	33%	39%	34%	33%	26%	47%

I approve of living together outside of marriage.										
	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	27%	26%	28%	24%	30%	24%	33%	20%	23%	39%
No	70%	73%	69%	73%	67%	75%	64%	78%	74%	58%

The Pulse of United Methodist Baby Boomers

**Homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle.**

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	35%	31%	37%	36%	33%	31%	36%	33%	25%	55%
No	62%	67%	59%	58%	65%	66%	60%	63%	74%	41%

**Abortion can be an appropriate means of birth control.**

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	14%	16%	12%	14%	13%	14%	12%	13%	11%	22%
No	85%	83%	87%	84%	86%	86%	87%	87%	85%	77%

**When I am too old to care for myself, I will live in a nursing home.**

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	62%	60%	63%	62%	61%	59%	65%	66%	60%	53%
No	34%	35%	33%	34%	33%	37%	31%	29%	34%	40%

**Physician-assisted suicide should be permitted by law.**

	Total Responses	Male	Female	Early Boomer	Late Boomer	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Yes	43%	46%	41%	44%	41%	41%	43%	43%	39%	53%
No	51%	51%	52%	49%	54%	53%	52%	52%	55%	40%
Unsure	6%	3%	7%	7%	5%	6%	4%	5%	7%	7%

## Which event of the '60s and '70s had the most impact in shaping your life?

(choose one)



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ■ President Kennedy's assassination (6%) | ■ Women's Liberation Movement (17%)           |
| ■ Civil Rights Movement (11%)            | ■ Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination (1%) |
| ■ Astronauts walking on the moon (9%)    | ■ The Pill and the Sexual Revolution (7%)     |
| ■ The Vietnam War (21%)                  | ■ President Nixon's resignation (3%)          |
| ■ Rock and Roll (8%)                     | ■ Other (10%)                                 |

Of the 10% who chose "other," many say that family, parents, or grandparents had the most impact in shaping their lives. As one UM Boomer put it, "None of these [events] really shaped my life because my family kept me very sheltered from change." Another says, "While these events struck me as important, the life shaping took place in the family and church." Another replies, "These other events were not as important as growing up in a great small town with friends and family." A divorce or a broken home is another major factor in shaping the lives of UM Boomers. Several respondents say that all of these events had a great impact in shaping their lives. One says, "The peace movement and Cultural Revolution spurred by Vietnam and many of these events relate. Many of my values were derived from the social movement calling for peace, loving one another, seeking more from life than material acquisitions, finding a way to contribute to humanity or improve the human condition." One cites the Cuban missile crisis as having an important impact on his life. Another cites the Cold War and atom bomb threat as having a great impact on shaping his life.

Some of the other "other" events that had the most impact on Boomer lives are sports, the Peace Corps, Earth Day/environmental concerns.

Then we asked the survey participants: **WHY did the event have the most impact in shaping your life?** We'll look at the top four events that most influenced Boomers' lives:



### 1. Impact of the Vietnam War

Many UM Boomers see the Vietnam War as an event that "tore our country apart. . . it was a war that no one could win and everyone lost." "I was drafted and served in Vietnam. [I] came home with a real understanding of life." "All of my values were called into question. Several of my friends died. Facing their deaths and trying to make sense of my loss of them prepared me to live true to my beliefs now. Yet, at the same time, death lost some sting." Survey participants knew men who died in the war or were there themselves and witnessed death first hand. UM Boomers who were too young to serve lost uncles, fathers, and brothers to this tragic event. UM Boomers feel that the U.S. went to war for "no real cause," "no clear mission and no end defined." UM Boomers are bitter that when the war was over, no real appreciation was shown to those who fought and served. Those who were old enough to be drafted were fearful of dying; they either enlisted, left the country, or went to college to avoid the draft. The threat of being drafted for this war helped or forced many young men to make decisions that they might not have made otherwise. One UM Boomer writes, "The [Vietnam] war initiated the cynical and apathetic outlook of the Baby Boomer generation and [its] mistrust of our political and legal systems." Remarks another, "The ongoing horror of thousands of young men being sent to slaughter by a bunch of bureaucrats for no legitimate purpose and without a clear mission or goal. . . I was afraid that when I reached draft age, I would become cannon fodder." On a

more positive note, some UM Boomers think the Vietnam War taught them about patriotism, responsibility, commitment, honor, and what it means to be a “Christian soldier no matter what the difficulty.” One Boomer says, “I learned what being an American is all about.”

## 2. Impact of the Women’s Liberation Movement

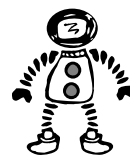


Boomers are also divided in their feelings about this second most chosen influence on shaping their lives. Some blame it for the breakdown of the American family. Others view it as creating unrealistic expectations of women as they try to balance work, home, family, and love life to be “super mom,” “super wife,” and “super professional.” Still others welcome the freedom they have been granted to work as equals in a man’s world. Boomer women are pleased that they are able to serve as clergy in our church and in other positions traditionally held by men. They are “free” to “be happy” as professionals, wives, and mothers. By delaying childbirth, women can “pursue their goals.” They feel that it is now “okay to be and do anything that [they] set [their] minds to do.”

## 3. Impact of the Civil Rights Movement

“It prevented me from getting at least three promotions or new positions.” “It caused me to have hope for the future, because of supposed equal civil rights.” “It created a lasting direction toward equality of all people regardless of race, age, sex, religion, etc.” “It helped me see (as a teenager) that there was and still is a problem with acceptance of ‘others.’” “Without it, my opportunities would have been greatly diminished.” “Made me aware of my prejudices.” “Represents a step towards encouraging acceptance and equal treatment to all people.” The Civil Rights Movement “has created more tension between the races.” “It resulted in riots [and I] became more aware of national civil rights activities, violent impact, and visibility of racism in America.” One UM Boomer says, “I really felt God was trying to get my attention to face racism for what it was/is. I think it worked.” Another Boomer remarks that both the Women’s Liberation Movement and the Civil Rights Movement “pointed out the hypocrisy of Christianity in the U.S.A.”

## 4. Impact of the astronauts walking on the moon



UM Boomers are proud of this event and see it as a great accomplishment for humanity. It was the right time for a positive event to occur. Our nation was at war in Vietnam and was in a period of low national morale. The moonwalk raised our pride in ourselves and in our country. It also helped us see that we are but a small part of God’s greater universe. Some comments: “It shows the potential of humanity to accomplish great things.” “I realized anything is possible and we are a very small part of the universe.” “I was old enough to appreciate the significance of setting the goal, hard work, and accomplishment of reaching that goal.” “It combined technology and human curiosity/restlessness to achieve great things.” “It made me believe that it is possible for mankind to work together toward a goal and accomplish it.” “It demonstrated what man can do, particularly Americans, when there is a common goal that brings commitment and excitement to see that it can be reached.” “Astronauts [walking] on the moon broadens our outlook and allows us to see our own insignificance in the scope of the universe.”

## Baby Boomer Questionnaire

Thank you for taking part in a national survey of Baby Boomers (adults born between 1946 and 1964) being conducted by Dr. Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. and Dr. Craig Kennet Miller. Please answer each question honestly and carefully. Questions? Call 615-340-7173 or e-mail [rgentzler@gbod.org](mailto:rgentzler@gbod.org)

**When completed, fold and seal your questionnaire and send it by Dec. 1, 1997 to:  
Office of Adult Ministries, Gen. Board of Discipleship, PO Box 840, Nashville, TN 37202**

First name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Year of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex:  Female  Male

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Place of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Are you:  Single (never married)  Married (never divorced)  
 Divorced  Widowed  
 Married Again  Living Together

2. Are you:  A parent  A grandparent  Not a parent

3. What is your ethnic group?

- Euro American (White)  Hispanic/Latino  Multiethnic  
 African American (Black)  Asian American  
 Native American  Pacific Islander

4. How much education have you completed? (pick one)

- Some high school  High school graduate  
 Some college  College graduate  
 Some graduate school  Graduate school

5. Do you consider yourself:  Liberal  Moderate  Conservative  None of these

6. In terms of religious beliefs, are you:  Atheist  Agnostic  Seeker  Believer

7. Which of the following have you experienced? (check all that apply)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage          | <input type="checkbox"/> Death of a spouse                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce           | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent in a blended family                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Remarriage        | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic illness (arthritis, hearing loss, etc.)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death of a parent | <input type="checkbox"/> Acute illness (cancer, stroke, etc.)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death of a child  | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent(s) living with you                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abortion          | <input type="checkbox"/> Caring for aging parent(s)                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Military Service  | <input type="checkbox"/> Tried illegal drugs                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job loss          | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical or sexual abuse                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Career change     | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious experience or conversion                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> "Born Again"      | <input type="checkbox"/> First one in your family to graduate from college |

8. Which one of the above has had the greatest impact on your life? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Why? \_\_\_\_\_

10. What is your annual household income? (pick one)

- Under \$20,000       \$20,000 - \$34,999       \$35,000 - \$49,999  
 \$50,000 - \$74,999       \$75,000 - \$100,000       Above \$100,000

11. With (1) as the highest, rank from 1-6 the following groupings from whom you have learned your core values:

- Church       Co-Workers       Family       Friends       Media       School

12. Which do you believe? (check all that apply)

- God is the Creator       All people will go to heaven       In Karma  
 God is an energy force       Only good people will go to heaven       In Angels  
 Jesus Christ is Lord & Savior       Only those saved will go to heaven       In Prayer  
 There is no hell       There is no heaven       In Dreams  
 I can find faith myself       The church is the best place to grow in faith

13. Are you active in any of the following religions? (pick one)

- Buddhism       Islam       Mormon       Protestant Christianity  
 Hinduism       Judaism       New Age       Catholic Christianity       Other

14. How often do you attend religious services? (pick one)

- Weekly       Twice a month       Monthly       Quarterly       Yearly       Never

15. What gives you the most meaning in life? (pick one)

- Community Service       Family       Friendships/Relationships  
 Religion/Spirituality       Work       Other, please be specific: \_\_\_\_\_

16. How would you describe your generation, the Baby Boomer Generation? (pick one)

- Giving and caring       Greedy and selfish  
 Hypocritical       Matured by experience and ready to lead  
 Other, please be specific: \_\_\_\_\_

17. What values do you wish to pass on to your children and/or future generations?

\_\_\_\_\_

18. Which is your most important concern as you raise your children? (pick one)

- Helping them develop a positive self-identity  
 Modeling healthy relationships  
 Spending enough time with them  
 Teaching them core values  
 Other, please be specific: \_\_\_\_\_

19. When you think about the next 10 years, how do you feel? (pick one)

- Hopeful       Confident       Apathetic       Anxious       Fearful

20. What do you hope to accomplish in the next 10 years? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

21. As you think about the next 10 years, which of the following will be society's greatest economic concern? (pick one)

- Paying for Social Security and Medicare
- Balancing the federal budget
- Health care costs for a growing older adult population
- Growing gap between the rich and the poor
- Other, please be specific: \_\_\_\_\_

22. As you think about the next 10 years, which of the following will be society's greatest social concern? (pick one)

- Fighting racism, sexism, and ageism
- Stopping the violence related to crime and drugs
- Caring for the homeless and mentally ill
- Raising a generation of fatherless children
- Other, please be specific: \_\_\_\_\_

23. As you think about the next 10 years, what is your greatest personal financial concern? (pick one)

- Paying for my child's college education
- Supporting my aging parent's needs
- Paying for the cost of my divorce
- Saving for retirement
- Paying off my mortgage
- Other, be specific: \_\_\_\_\_

24. How satisfied are you with your life?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

25. Do you regularly exercise (at least 3 times a week) and eat nutritious meals?

- Always
- Usually
- Rarely
- Never

26. How do you view your own aging? (pick one)

- I plan to fight growing older
- I plan to deny I am growing older
- I plan to relax and not worry about my aging
- I plan to reinvent my life during my retirement years
- I plan to grow older gracefully
- Other, please be specific: \_\_\_\_\_

27. Although aging is a natural process of life, as we grow older and reach our retirement years, how do you want to be identified? (pick one)

- Elder
- Mature adult
- Older adult
- Senior citizen
- Adult
- Other, please be specific: \_\_\_\_\_

28. What are your greatest fears about growing older? (select two)

- Not having enough money to live on
- Losing my sense of purpose in life
- Being a burden to my family
- Not leaving my children an inheritance
- Living in a nursing home
- Other, please be specific: \_\_\_\_\_
- Dying
- Failing health
- Death of spouse
- Losing my independence
- Memory loss

29. Do you plan to retire?  Yes  No

30. If Yes, at what age do you plan to retire? \_\_\_\_\_

31. When I retire, I plan to: (check all that apply)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Travel                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Spend more time with my family                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learn new skills         | <input type="checkbox"/> Continue working even during my retirement years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Start a new career       | <input type="checkbox"/> Move to another climate for my health            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Move closer to my family | <input type="checkbox"/> Perform community service                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grow spiritually         | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please be specific: _____                 |

32. Do you agree (Yes) or disagree (No) with the following?

- |   |                              |                             |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| I will receive Social Security benefits when I retire               | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I will have a pension when I retire                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I am personally saving for my retirement                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| My parents are/were better off financially than me                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Organized religion is in touch with my needs                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Organized religion is "big business" and money                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| The government is doing a good job running this country             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| The government should end Affirmative Action                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| There is more violence in my community than 3 years ago             | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| My family enjoys a close relationship                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I am committed to having a long-term relationship with my spouse    | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I am satisfied with my career                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I am satisfied with my faith  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| The criminal justice system is fair                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I believe in capital punishment                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I approve of living together outside of marriage                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Abortion can be an appropriate means of birth control               | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| When I am too old to care for myself, I will live in a nursing home | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Physician assisted suicide should be permitted by law               | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

33. Which event of the 60's & 70's had more impact in shaping your life? (pick one)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> President Kennedy's assassination | <input type="checkbox"/> Astronauts walking on the moon         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rock and Roll                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Civil Rights Movement         | <input type="checkbox"/> The Vietnam War                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Women's Liberation Movement       | <input type="checkbox"/> The Pill and the Sexual Revolution     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> President Nixon's resignation     | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please be specific: _____       |

34. Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Thoughts for Reflection

The results of the survey indicate that most United Methodist Boomers are happy and satisfied with life. They appear to have outgrown the instability and turmoil of their youth and now experience great satisfaction with marriage, as well as pride in their children and work, and hope in their faith.

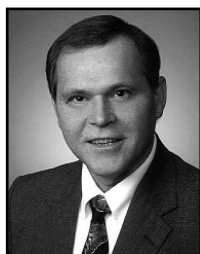
The “me” ethic of this generation has been replaced by the “we” ethic, as Boomers adopt a new “family values” ethic. Since 95% of the men and 90% of the women surveyed intend to be with their spouses for a lifetime, perhaps by this time the worst marriages have already dissolved.

Contrary to popular polls relating to aging Boomers, United Methodist Boomers are not worried about their aging and plan to grow old gracefully. Now that the majority of Boomers have reached mid-life, middle age is “in,” and the youth culture is “out.”

It is interesting that United Methodist Boomers carry negative baggage concerning views of their own generation. This is not unusual. It is a learned response. The media and other institutions (including the church) labeled this generation selfish, irresponsible, radical, and seekers of instant gratification. People have a tendency to live out their life fulfilling the expectations of others. As a result, only 44% of United Methodist Boomers view their generation in positive terms. Most people surveyed had little good to say about their generation; yet 95% of those surveyed indicate that they are quite satisfied with their lives.

While 4 out of 5 survey respondents expressed a positive outlook about the future, many UM Boomers expressed a growing concern about the escalating cost of health care, violence in our society, and saving enough money for retirement.

Our churches determine, to some extent, the nature of what is possible for ministry with Boomers. As a result of this survey, how do you envision ministry with this segment in your church? How can you reach out to non-church Boomers? How will you nurture Boomers in the Christian faith? How will you help them relate to God through Jesus Christ? What can your church do to equip them to live as Christians in the world today? With increasing numbers of middle and older adults, how will your church be transformed by Boomers?



### About the Authors

The two United Methodist Boomers who analyzed the surveys and wrote this report are **Richard H. Gentzler, Jr.**, D.Min., Director of the Office of Adult Ministries at the General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church, and **Carolyn S. Poole**, Assistant in the Office of Adult Ministries and Customer Resource Specialist for Family and Life-Span Ministries.

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