

## DIRECTOR'S DESK

A baby boomer is anyone born between 1946 and 1964 in a country that experienced an unusual spike in birth rates following World War II, a phenomenon commonly known as the baby boom.

**Size and Economic Impact** There is much debate that the 76 million American children born between 1945 and 1964 represent a cohort that is significant on account of its size. As of 2007, the term baby boomer is generally applied to anyone between the ages of 44 and 62. Boomers comprise nearly 20% of the adult US population.

**Cultural identity** The baby boomers were the first group to be raised on television, and television has been identified as “the institution that solidified the sense of generational identity more than any other.”

In 1993, *Time* magazine reported on the religious affiliations of baby boomers. Citing Wade Clark Roof, a sociologist at the University of California at Santa Barbara, the articles stated that about 42% of baby boomers were dropouts from formal religion, a third had never strayed from church, and one-fourth of boomers were returning to religious practice. The boomers returning to religion were “usually less tied to tradition and less dependable as church members than the loyalists. They are also more liberal, which deepens rifts over issues like abortion and homosexuality. (The above information was copied from Wikipedia.)

I missed the baby boom generation by four years, but they are right on my heels. I want to make a few observations about baby boomers from my point of view. These are, of course, simplifications.

1. Many do not have a commitment to a particular church or denomination, and will switch churches and denominations quite readily.
2. Many of them have not been adequately taught how to be generous and can not be depended upon as consistent givers in the local congregations.
3. Many depend on credit cards and save very little for their future.
4. Many do not hold to strong religious convictions that were the norm only a generation ago.

This represents a problem for the next generation, the children of the boomers. A recent survey related to the Mennonite Church USA (*The Mennonite*, Feb. 6, 2007) showed that the Mennonite church is aging. In 1972, 54% were under the age of 45. In 2006, only 30% are under age 45. Compare this to mainline Protestants who have a 42% rate under age 45, and their researchers describe it as “literally dying out.” Compare that rate with the Amish who have 85-90% retention rate of their youth. Since I’m not a sociologist, I will simply suggest that you make your own deductions. Are the blind leading the blind?

—Joseph Yoder



**MENNO-HOF**

AMISH-MENNONITE VISITORS' CENTER

P.O. Box 701

Shipshewana, Indiana 46565

*See and Hear  
the Amish-Mennonite Story*

### VISITOR COMMENTS

*“Attention to historical detail and emphasis on Jesus as source of strength.”*

*“The variety of methods used to teach the story of the Anabaptists.”*

*“Knowing the differences and common similarities between the Amish and ourselves.”*

#### Visitors:

**January – June '07  
9,886**

**May '88 – June '07  
765,046**

*Reunion is published quarterly to keep our friends informed of happenings at Menno-Hof. Direct questions or comments to Joseph Yoder, director, at [jjyoder@mennohof.org](mailto:jjyoder@mennohof.org)*

#### **Menno-Hof Amish-Mennonite Visitors' Center**

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# reunion

## RETIREMENT... Now What! (The “Nudge” In Your Golden Years)

By Don Buller

One of the first questions usually asked when meeting a stranger is where are you from or what do you do. In our culture we human beings seem to place a lot of emphasis on what we do in our paid working environment or where we live. At times it appears our self image is wrapped up in those two items.

But what happens when we lay down the mantle of “paid work” and enter the world of retirement? I propose that the retirement years can become the best years of your life if God’s service is involved in your plan. The children are grown, financial stability probably is in place and now is the time to pursue new experiences and activities. We who are retired are in a group of adults “seasoned by life” and have many useful years ahead.

Many folk are retiring at younger ages and will have more time to do other things. Some find jobs at reduced hours and pay in order to keep busy and supplement income. Still, others may do very little. Recreational opportunities and travel may be on the agenda. Volumes have been written on planning for retirement and choosing how to spend one’s time during this phase of life.

My wife and I were faced with this same situation. We made long and short lists of things to do: travel, build a model train layout, visit the children, write family histories, take up hobbies and on and on. Then we examined the opportunities of volunteering our time in worthwhile causes where our time would have an impact not only on us but also our fellow man. We decided to become “the hands and feet of Jesus.”

Please allow me to suggest and challenge you to consider a path that will be the highlight of your retirement years: the path of volunteering to help and serve others. Based on our experience I can guarantee that you will never be the same. Life takes on a new interest when we invest in the lives of others. Your life is God’s gift to you, what you do with it is your gift to God. This is not to suggest that prior to retirement the average believer is sitting on their hands. We probably all have been involved in various activities of our church.

It has been said that retirement is when you stop making a living and start making a life. The question posed is “What part does God play in your retirement life—spare tire or steering wheel?” And, if one decides to allow God to be an influence in that decision, how do we determine the path to take. Remember, age really doesn’t matter, unless you are cheese.

In a cartoon of Pontius Puddle the main character is commenting to his friend, “Sometimes I’d like to ask God why he allows poverty, famine and injustice when he could do something about it.” His friend responds by asking, “What’s stopping you?” The main character states,

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### THANK YOU

By Joseph Yoder

Non-profit places like Menno-Hof depend on seniors like Don and Marilyn Buller. We would find it very difficult to keep our doors open to the thousands of visitors that come here every year were it not for our retired personnel. For almost 20 years Menno-Hof has been the recipient of this grace.

I will only mention one of our volunteers. John Nisley has been with us for 19 years. He’s 90 years old. In the last year his family has urged him to quit driving his car due to his failing eyesight. So every Tuesday morning I take a drive to his lovely lakeside home about four miles from Menno-Hof. John reminds me of a walking encyclopedia in matters pertaining to our Anabaptist faith. His cheerful and friendly manner often takes me out of my myopic view of life and what I want to get done for the day. John works in the “Faith and Action” area where he can visit with people and introduce them to the Tornado Room and the Meeting House. Our visitors are drawn to this friendly Anabaptist man.

Not only do we at Menno-Hof greatly appreciate our senior retired volunteers for their service but also for their friendship and conversation. These folks have taught me so much in the past 6 years and I consider each one a vital part of my life. Perhaps you would like to broaden the horizons of your world as a retired person. Here at Menno-Hof you will literally meet persons from almost any country in the world. You know where to find us to sign up.

## RETIREMENT... Now What! ...cont. from page 1

“I’m afraid God might ask me the same question.” I trust you can ask that same question and allow yourself to answer it with a retirement of voluntary Christian service.

Opportunities abound for those brave enough to venture out of a comfortable situation and allow themselves to be “stretched” into new activities while helping others. Let’s examine some possible guidelines that can be applied to a decision making process.

### Step 1: Make a Commitment to Voluntary Service

You may choose to volunteer your time in secular or Christian service. With the proper attitude either can become an avenue of expressing one’s Christian faith. Volunteer service to a Christian organization can be a double blessing because you are not only expressing your walk of faith but at the same time helping the Christian organization.

Do not spend too much energy fretting at this point. Get the “commitment” step out of the way early and see the exciting opportunities God puts in front of you as you move out in faith. It takes that step of commitment to get moving.

### Step 2: Take the “First” Step

Even though previous work experience lends a clue for deciding what to do, keep in mind that most places utilizing volunteers in various activities will train as necessary. Also, many of you may want to embark upon an entirely new career in voluntary work. There is some recent medical information that as we age, doing new things and keeping busy helps to avoid physical problems as well as warding off the effect of dementia.

Example: My wife and I were both government workers in our other life. I had limited building skills but I did enjoy being a fix-it type of person. We both agreed that we wanted to travel and live in our recreational vehicle, a fifth-wheel trailer. We discovered an organization called the Mobile Missionary Assistance Program (MMAP) where you can volunteer three weeks at a time, six hours a day, four days per week in construction-related work building churches, Christian campgrounds, homes for handicapped, etc. They assured us we would work along side experienced persons. “Take

hammer, will train.” That was enough for us so we joined and subsequently worked in over 70 different locations throughout the United States in 12 years. I worked alongside experienced men and learned construction skills by doing it. Later we joined another organization called Servants On Wheels Ever Ready (SOWERS) and performed similar work.

On top of that we were able to combine our love for traveling to places we never would have heard about. We had three days off each week to explore the local area in the location where we were working. We were meeting new people and developing life long friends by working together in a common endeavor.

### Step 3: Modify the Plan and the Path, as Necessary

In our volunteer faith journey work we also discovered that Habitat for Humanity had an RV component so we joined up and did some work with them in building houses for people who otherwise could not afford a home. The potential homeowner was required to help build and invest “sweat equity” in their new home. This gave us another opportunity to meet new people.

Then we felt the “nudge of God” to work for the Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) where we discovered you don’t have to have any experience but it did help. We helped rebuild houses destroyed by natural disasters in Birmingham, Alabama and Jackson, Tennessee. What a joy to see smiling faces as families and singles moved into their rebuilt or new homes. We were truly the “hands and feet of Jesus” in helping persons in need.

### Step 4: Be Open to New Paths

Soon after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the Southern States we were wintering in Arizona. As we enjoyed some time off from volunteering I could not get out of my mind the many people affected by that disaster. Looking back on that time I can see that that concern was the “nudge of God” (Nudge #1) to get involved again. Many folk might say “God led me to...” That doesn’t mean much to me. *How* does God lead me, is the question I always ask. For me it was through awareness, nudges, concerns and confirmation.

I discussed this with my wife and learned she

felt the same way (Nudge #2). Then it occurred to me that with my experience I could volunteer to be a crew leader or construction foreman. Leadership is always needed at a disaster location. I had passed the three-quarter century mark and a 40-45 hour work week may be a little too strenuous but crew leading would be different. The response to my offer to MDS Headquarters was, “Would you consider being the project director and your wife the office manager in Point Aux Chenes, Louisiana?” (Nudge #3)

A quiet contemplation and prayer led us to accept the challenge. Little did we know the “opportunities” that would come our way in this assignment. But, God is always along side, as we would experience.

While on that assignment a thought came to my mind. Many retired folk have recreational vehicles and would like to work on an MDS project but by either choice or age limitations can not work the 40-45 hours weekly in an MDS camp setting. The idea was born to suggest to MDS leadership (Nudge #4) to develop a RV component for disaster work. Guess what? They gave the green light and asked us to develop the idea into a new MDS program and direct the first MDS RV camp (Nudge #5). So, with the help of another couple we patterned a four-day work week, six hours daily, four week minimum commitment endeavor and wrote the RV manual for leaders. We started the first MDS RV project near Mobile, Alabama, and later directed one in Hackberry, Louisiana. God blessed this work and the two pilot projects led to a full program with MDS. Here is an opportunity we recommend to anyone with a self-contained recreational vehicle.

We needed to take some time off and take a rest but God had a different idea. While perusing opportunities on the Internet under the Senior Opportunities for Older People (SOOP), a Mennonite Mission Network component, we soon learned that Menno-Hof needed tour guides in Shipshewana, Indiana. They would also provide a furnished apartment to live in. After another series of “nudges” from God (1-Information obtained, 2-Need identified, 3-Opportunity defined, 4-Acceptance by facility, 5-Details worked out) we found our selves serving at Menno-Hof for the summer of 2007.

Please don’t tell us that God doesn’t lead by “nudges.” We have found out otherwise through the past 16 years of volunteer work.

It is now in our plan to go to our home to Fresno, California and take some time off to reflect on the blessings of God in our retirement years and yes, wait for the next “nudge.” What’s next? Where? When? What? We do not know at this point. We will wait for another “nudge.”

*“Only one life, ’twill soon be past, Only what’s done for Christ, will last.”*

Think on a few of the “blessings” ahead if you decide to become involved in voluntary Christian service:

- Experience a purposeful retirement. Becoming the “hands and feet” of Jesus offers a very rewarding retirement activity.
- Fellowship with other persons of a like mind and develop friendships across the country as you become part of an activity that works together and plays together.
- Accept an assignment in a new location and have time each week to tour the countryside and experience and see new places.
- Visit other churches and worship in various settings.
- Experience new work assignments and learn new tasks under experienced leadership.
- Build a reservoir of memories for your “bank of memories” that you can draw on later in life when you no longer can travel and do volunteer work.
- Be involved in life changing experiences. Guarantee: “You will never be the same.”

**A closing comment** is that many organizations needing volunteer assistance may furnish living quarters and some will help with living expenses. The best place to start is with our own denominational organizations. Search for the ones that suit you best.

Don Buller and his wife Marilyn call Fresno, California, home. They are currently volunteering at Menno-Hof in Shipshewana, Indiana.

### COPIER NEEDED

We have used the same Konica Copier at Menno-Hof for 9 years. It has started to make the sounds of a death rattle. Sometime in the very near future we will need to replace it. The type of copier we need is going to cost Menno-Hof in the vicinity of \$5,200. This is a special price for non-profit organizations. We are asking our supporters to help us with this expense. Please earmark your donation “copier.” Thank you for considering this need.