

# OPEN FORUM

Although the Nov/Dec/Jan issue was helpful in identifying many issues around hospitality, I was disappointed that hardly any mention was given to the very largest segment of the population who will be entering the doors of the church in the next 20 years, namely older adults. Some 76 million Baby Boomers will be reaching age 65 in that period, and many of them will seek to connect with churches as they continue exploring their spirituality. Are we ready, and will we know how to welcome them?

**Alan Carroll**  
Lebanon, Ohio

I was looking through the new issue of *Circuit Rider*, "Opening the Doors" (Nov/Dec/Jan) expectantly. I was sure there would be a story on welcoming

young people into our churches. Given the level of concern we have seen about youth and young adult participation rates recently, I was surprised that you would do an issue of *Circuit Rider* on hospitality and leave out young people almost completely.

**Mike Ratliff, Associate General Secretary**

Division on Ministries with Young People, General Board of Discipleship

I just finished reading the article, "Welcoming 'Time Share' Christians," by Gil Rendle (Nov/Dec/Jan). The thought that came to me immediately is "cheap grace". I am convinced by God's Word that there is no such a thing as a "Time Share Christian". Anything that we

put in front of God's call on our life is idolatry. Rendle talked about "a decreasing margin of life" and "the amount of discretionary time left over after people have fulfilled the primary commitments they have made (for example, to work and family)." He uses this as an excuse for people coming to church infrequently and not committing to one church. We all know that this happens, but we should not make excuses for it or affirm it. The problem in our church is that we have our priorities mixed up. It should be God first and then family and work. I believe that in our effort to throw up a "big tent" so that everybody can come in, the United Methodist Church has become a church of excuses. We excuse sin and call it tolerance and we excuse a lack of commitment and call it hospitality. Sometimes there is just no excuse and we need to call sin what it is.

**Allan Murphy, Local Pastor**  
Mount Hermon UMC  
Lynch Station, Virginia

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In "Welcoming 'Time Share' Christians," (Nov./Dec./Jan.) Gil Rendle makes excellent points about the need for congregations to adapt to changing circumstances and shift to valuing participation as well as membership. But the vision of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, and not just the individual. Transformation of the world will more likely happen through the actions of communities focused on the reign of God, rather than individuals seeking to meet personal needs. I am left with the question of how to help "time share Christians" recognize this call from God. Rendle asks if congregations can learn to "serve time share Christians." I believe it is possible that the best service we can offer is to help people recognize a greater purpose in their lives, and that living into this greater purpose will require more than just dropping in to church once in awhile.

**Kathy Neary**

Pastor, Connell (Wash.) UMC

I thank you for the articles on "Opening the Door" (Nov/Dec/Jan) and reaching out to all people. What I found disturbing was that I did not find any open doors to the most isolated and suffering individuals—those who are gay or lesbian. I still believe the day will come when both the Constitution and The United Methodist Church will enable all people, no matter their race, sex, or sexual orientation to have the same protection under the law to select the person they love for marriage. Some day all will have a place at the table.

**Jim Jacobson**

Retired Pastor, Peoria, Arizona

I would like to ask for some future articles on welcoming and ministering to those who have criminal sex offender records. We have seen Safe Sanctuaries where safety of our children and vulnerable adults trumps most other actions in our church. I would like to hear of some other ministries where

these individuals have been engaged in the life and ministry of congregations. It would be good to hear from youth workers and conference youth directors on how to protect the vulnerable, but offer these offenders Christ. Do we have to create a sequestered ministry that serves only sex offenders? How do we allow programs for sex offenders, when public knowledge of such programs could be the death knell to other ministries when parents withdraw their children from participating or programs like Boy and Girl Scouts look for new church sponsors? I realize this may seem like a narrow focus, but just in our small conference, I have heard of seven or eight churches facing this type of situation. Too often these individuals are cast off as we concentrate our efforts on more socially acceptable ministries.

**Anonymous UM Pastor**

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