

“Saving Pam and Paul”

by Betsey Newenhuyse

Remember a while back when there were a lot of glowing articles about affluent 50-year-olds cashing it in and retiring to someplace like the South Carolina Low Country and running a bed-and-breakfast? Then we started hearing about boomers quote “reinventing” themselves in their later career years, turning to different pursuits and chasing dreams.

Boy, does all that seem like a different world. Most boomers I talk to now just say, “Forget reinventing myself, I’m going to be seventy and still stuck in traffic every morning.” They, we, can’t afford to retire. Some of us have lost jobs or are struggling to cobble a freelance career together. Others have seen their investment portfolios take big hits or the equity in their homes – the boomer piggy banks – eaten away by the big bad wolf of hard times. We read these gloom-and-doom warnings about how you need a million-dollar nest egg to maintain even a modest middle-class lifestyle, how you may outlive your money, how your health may fail and you won’t be able to work as long as you expected. It happens, “they” say, to 40 percent of us.

Good grief. You keep listening to these dire predictions, your health *will* fail.

Well, as for me and my house, I don’t want to be schlepping to an office when I’m seventy. I want to be playing with my grandchildren, traveling, writing, and looking for whatever other surprises the Lord has around the corner. And I know I’m not alone.

But the hard reality is, many of us are staring at some tough economic truths. So just *what* are people supposed to do? Amid all this hand-wringing, I think we’re missing something. And that is: we *are* our brother’s keeper, and our sister’s keeper, and our friend’s keeper. If you have the potential of seeing millions of solidly middle-class Pams and Pauls and Dougs and Debbies wonder how they’re going to keep a roof over their heads in their senior years – that’s an issue for God’s people, for the church. But I also think we have an opportunity to think in new ways about building community with one another.

This “doing life together” question is one the church has wrestled with for a long time, really without finding good answers. But now there’s a greater urgency to the discussion. For example, we have friends I’ll call Dave and Kathy. If they suffer from health issues or financial setbacks, that’s of more than passing concern to Fritz and me. We are *called* to do something. It might be sharing a meal once a week to ease the burden on both of our households, or offering them temporary housing, or driving them places. But we need to step up and out of our isolated –and burdened—family units.

Of course, these kinds of neighbor-helping-neighbor efforts have been going on for a long time. What’s different now is that the sheer scope of the need will challenge the church to more creative and more systematic solutions—even to new ways of thinking about family and how

people live. It might mean promoting shared or intergenerational housing—which, by the way, is growing anyway, according to some studies. It might mean swapping ideas around entrepreneurial ventures—because most assuredly, even if we give up the daily grind, boomers *will* need to make money and will want to contribute-in our so-called retirement years. It might mean a bunch of old and new friends sharing soup every Tuesday night. And it *will* mean the church truly being the church.

I really don't think our nation is prepared for the impact of 77 million senior boomers. But the train is coming—and if we, God's people, jump on, I think we'll be amazed at where the journey will take us. Want to join me? For Prime Time America, this is Betsey Newenhuyse.