

And an Echo Boomer Shall Lead Them

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The largest high school graduating class in our country's history, numbering 3.2 million, will graduate in 2009, according to the New York Times. "While a slow descent is projected to follow, the growing value of a college degree means record high enrollments every year until 2015, according to a June report from the United States Department of Education." Who are these young people? They are members of the "echo boom," children of baby boomers, and they are the future of our church.

I feel better about that future after answering the door of our house last Monday around five o'clock in the afternoon. Standing at the door were Emily, Jackie, Katie and Morven, all members of the youth group at our local United Methodist Church, members of the high school class of 2010, echo boomers. I thought they were here to see our son Simon, a classmate of theirs, but instead they wanted to talk to their pastor, my wife LeeAnn, about an idea they had. The girls, all incoming freshmen this school year, wanted to talk to LeeAnn and seek her endorsement for a project they are planning to combat hunger and poverty.

They're calling the program "Hungry 2 Serve," yes, "2" instead of "to," symptomatic I suppose of the grammar peculiar to the instant messaging generation, but that's beside the point. The important point is that these four young women have taken the initiative to launch a well thought-out, 9-month program to educate our congregation and to raise money to combat hunger and poverty among the most vulnerable of God's children. They have decided to forego their birthday parties and have challenged their parents and friends to donate the money that otherwise would have gone for parties and gifts, and instead use it to fight hunger. As my late grandmother would have said, "Isn't that something?"

They got the idea at summer camp, specifically at the Warren W. Willis Camp in Fruitland Park, one of the crown jewels of our conference's shared ministries. Campers this summer were encouraged not only to commit themselves to Jesus Christ in a very personal way, but also to commit themselves to social justice and to work to fulfill the kingdom of God here and now.

I'm grateful for the dedicated staff at our summer camp who inspired such a wonderful response to God's call to feed the hungry. For generations the conference camps and retreat ministries have been integral in shaping lives of Christian discipleship, and the upcoming conference capital and endowment campaign will offer us all an opportunity to ensure that future generations of disciples will have the same opportunity as Morven, Katie, Jackie and Emily. (For more information on the campaign, follow this link: <http://www.flumc.info/cgi-script/csArticles/articles/000025/002556.htm>).

I'm grateful for our conference office of connectional ministries, specifically Dr. Larry Rankin who specializes in global mission and who will advise and help guide the hunger project at our church. We are indeed a connectional church, and when we work together in shared ministries, the possibilities are endless.

I'm especially grateful for young people who can teach us about discipleship and stewardship, which, when you get right down to it, are the same thing.

As the stewardship voice of the Florida Conference, the Foundation is ready to help you, your family and your church with anything related to comprehensive Christian stewardship. For more information please call, click or write us at 1-866-363-9673 toll-free; www.fumf.org; or PO Box 3549, Lakeland, FL 33802.