

Dieses Dokument ist an der Lausanne IV-Konferenz in Seoul im Herbst 2024 entstanden. Andi Bachmann-Roth (SEA) hat in der Collaborativ Action Group zum Thema Global Ageing mitgewirkt. Dieser Artikel fasst die Ergebnisse dieser Gruppe zusammen.

GAP ONE | GLOBAL AGEING

1. LISTEN TO THE CURRENT REALITY

The most notable aspect of Global Ageing is that it is a universal human experience. All of us are on that journey and it ends, for all of us, with our mortality. However, what ageing looks like in this era is different than at any other point in human history. Lifespans are increasing across the globe. At the same time, technology, economics, culture, and society are accelerating towards an unknown future.

As we race forward, the generation gap in lifestyles, values, and social norms gets ever wider. It also results in vast differences between the old and the young in terms of financial outlook, and even more significantly, birthrates. People are living longer and longer, while having fewer and fewer children. Diseases that afflict older bodies and minds are becoming worldwide issues. We are culturally obsessed with youthfulness, but power and wealth are increasingly concentrated in the hands of older generations. This in turn fuels resentment and ageism. Digital advancements make us more connected than ever, but isolation and loneliness are reaching epidemic proportions. The factors contributing to all of this are many-layered and complex, but what is clear is that global ageing is an onrushing tsunami, the impact of which will be felt by everyone. It is no surprise that the governments of most nations are woefully ill-equipped in readying their constituencies for what is coming. Most public policy focuses on the economic consequences of global ageing, but we also see the needles of culture and bioethics moving with chilling implications.

More concerning is the lack of preparedness in our churches of the current and looming challenges. For starters, there is the issue of awareness. Most Christians – like everyone else – remain ignorant of the trends and long-term implications of global ageing. Most congregations tend to be well-populated by the senior generation, but those who encounter the difficult realities of getting old are usually relegated to well-intentioned prayer notices in the announcements. The Church and a large proportion of parachurch organizations have instead focused on the young. The sad irony is that despite the immensity of resources poured into youth and children's ministries, young people are turning away from Christianity in unprecedented numbers. Nuclear families become the target of congregations eager for numerical growth bank their future on attracting nuclear families, even as social realities make such families less and less common. Those who do not fit this traditional mould are too often left feeling unwanted.

Church leaders are ill-prepared and untrained for fruitful labour among seniors. Better training and resources must be developed – especially as the challenge is only going to increase. There is a pronounced need for biblical teaching on ageing, on death and dying, on resurrection hope, and on relating to the senior generation.

Despite these challenges, there are encouraging developments. Networks that minister into this space fly mostly under the radar and are necessarily local. Working with seniors does not give you a

high profile or a global platform. Entering into such ministry generally requires you to disappear. But these networks exist, and are quietly spreading.

The area of greatest potential is revealed in the hunger for connection that people of all generations experience. Multigenerational ministries and intergenerational mentoring are more than niche opportunities; they are essential components to demonstrating the reconciling power of the gospel to a divided, hurting world. There is no entity on Earth that is more well-equipped to make a difference. But the Church must step up and own this issue before it can see real impact.

2. IMAGINE A PREFERRED REALITY

Ageing is truly universal. Its many impacts will never cease to shape us – at least not until death is finally defeated. But if the body of Christ can step up, there is genuine potential to see breakthrough in these domains:

- Informing and advocating with effectiveness on issues related to global ageing
- Evangelizing the senior generation – the fastest-growing population segment in the world
- Making disciples who faithfully follow Jesus, in intergenerational Kingdom communities, from their first until their last day
- Mobilizing the untapped mission force of the senior generation
- Partnering across all spheres to provide holistic care, dignity, and purpose as people age

What would this look like? How would it happen?

First, there would be a shift in how we *think* about ageing. People's worth would not be calculated based on their productivity or economic potential. The sanctity of life would be recognized, especially at both the beginning and end of life. Ageing and the aged would be destigmatized. The Church would be able to dispense with unbiblical mindsets and cultivate biblical, holistic ways of understanding and engaging with this issue.

This would include the development of robust theologies of ageing, disease, disability, and death. How younger generations relate to older ones would be informed and shaped by Scripture. Christians would be equipped to face the end of life with hope and expectation, celebrating lives well lived amidst confidence that death is not the end.

Second, there would be a transformation in how the Church ministers into the sphere of ageing. Churches would be spaces where every generation feels a sense of welcome and belonging, giving according to their areas of strength and receiving according to those of need. Churches would inculcate a culture of reciprocal care. Congregations would become communities of integrated elder care, mutual encouragement, intentional mentoring, and multigenerational ministry. This will bring *shalom* to Christians of all ages, and will offer a compelling witness to society.

Churches will also commit a similar level of resources and energy to senior ministry as that devoted to youth and children. No seniors anyway would be isolated beyond the reach of the good news.

Leadership would become informed, educated, equipped, and motivated to lead well into the space of global ageing. And the older generation will be released into their full potential, not living out their final decades as bystanders, but as experienced, wise, respected ministers of the gospel.

Third, engagement of the Church with government, health care entities, medical research and technology, and the marketplace will yield policy changes that improve the quality of life for the entire senior generation and encourage a more sustainable and humane approach to ageing.

Churches partner effectively with communities to eradicate the loneliness epidemic. A younger generation will be mobilized to enter into the burgeoning care profession as marketplace missionaries, providing both meaningful employment for millions and the opportunity for Kingdom impact amongst seniors.

Finally, all of this would be accelerated through the formation of networks and platforms for collaboration at the local, regional, and global levels. This includes, but is not limited to, Lausanne.

3. CREATE A WAY TO CLOSE THE GAP

The first and necessary step toward solutions is generating awareness. People are mostly unaware of the scale and implications of global ageing. More research needs to be done, and the research already done needs more traction. Along with awareness comes advocacy. Government policy, prevalent values, church practices, leadership formation, etc, are much more likely to shift when an army of advocates is working for change. Inevitably, this requires the generation and pooling of resources – financial, human, and informational.

In churches, this must begin with engagement. The effort to change mindsets, break down prejudice between generations, and pioneer collaboration is daunting but essential. Changes in church practice will follow changes in understanding. Therefore, new theological frameworks must be developed.

New perspectives on biblical family, on community, and on corporate discipleship must be articulated. Church life must include mutually edifying connections between different generations. When such shifts are made, we will see every older person in the church with a sense of belonging and the opportunity to be fruitful to the fullest until the end of life.

Potential collaborative partners are countless. They include:

- Existing entities that provide care for seniors – hospitals, care homes, retirement communities, hospices, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and much more
- Government departments, social service providers, and charities focused on this sector
- Domain experts and specialists, especially in the research sphere
- Marketplace/business entities
- Theological training institutions
- Groups of churches together
- Mission organizations and mobilizers
- Believers are already active in local networks

Within Lausanne, there are many cross-cutting themes across the Issue Networks. Lausanne Regions provide contextually appropriate connections, since the impact of global ageing is felt quite differently from region to region. YLGen and the need for mentoring relationships is perhaps the most potent opportunity.

Many collaborative solutions were proposed:

- A registry of Christian providers within the ageing space
- Forums developed to share and learn from one another – formal and informal, virtual and in-person
- A bibliography of existing resources that inform and equip the Church on global ageing
- The publication of best practices for ministry to and among seniors
- The publication of best practices for intergenerational ministry
- A collection of case studies on ministry in the context of global ageing
- A book of testimonies by seniors who found purpose and fulfilment through being (re-)mobilized into ministry later in life
- The creation of teaching/modules for theological institutions to equip future leaders to be effective in this sphere
- A theological resource – even as short as a Lausanne-style Statement – that offers biblical perspectives on ageing, honouring the senior generation, healthy intergenerational relationships, dying, death, and resurrection hope
- Advocacy for intentional focus on this issue at all gatherings that are global in scope – Christian or otherwise

4. COMMUNICATE A PRAYERFUL PROPOSAL

The above collaborative solutions all beckon. But responses need to be multi-faceted since the issues are far-reaching, but vary widely from locality to locality. They fall broadly into four categories: Connect, Organize, Speak, and Act

CONNECT

Those serving in the global ageing space often feel like a voice in the wilderness. The Congress showed that there are many like us, operating below the radar. We will endeavour to keep in touch with one another and engaged within virtual spaces – including the Lausanne Action Hub. We are energized as we discover and connect with others serving in these same spaces, and learn of how consequential this issue truly is. We also commit to building regional connections, recognizing the commonalities of experience within our regions.

ORGANIZE

We aim to see the formation of a Global Ageing Issue Network in Lausanne. This issue's impending impact is too monumental for it to be ignored. It was agreed that the many dreams and goals that emerged from discussions would be better served – and more likely accomplished – if an issue network existed.

There is, of course, a great deal already going on in this area, and much of it can be appropriately tied into any newly formed issue network. With scale of the task ahead and the current lack of resources/traction, there is no desire to reinvent the wheel or duplicate what is already happening.

COMMUNICATE

Issue network or not, we committed to increase the circulation of information, sharing data, articles, reports, and resources. Doing so will raise awareness of both the need for and the possibilities of fruitful ministry in the global ageing space.

Another commitment was to change the narrative by changing our language. There is no “next generation” and no “past generation”. There is only the “now” generation, and all of us are a part of it. From the oldest to the youngest, we are all needed, we all have value, we all have opportunity to show the world who Jesus is.

We will begin to tell our own stories of ageing, of retirement, and the journey of discovery that these bring. Telling our stories inspires and encourages others. Displaying vulnerability as we share our struggles will break down walls and foster authentic connection. Demonstrating humble and listening attitudes as we invite others to share will validate their own very real experiences of ageism and isolation.

ACT

Everything begins with our own immediate, local situations, so it is vital to identify and engage with what is already going on in our local communities. We want to see our own local congregations gain an expanded vision of what the church can be and providing practical ways to get involved. This especially applies to mobilizing the older generation into ministry, connecting people with opportunities.

It seems appropriate to close with a term that is new to many of us: *intergenerationality*. We recognize that tearing down the walls between generations is incredibly strategic, but will also require patience, faith, and grace. It will take people who can lead by example. It is easy to make suggestions and say what “should” be, but buy-in will be needed from both the young and the old.

By definition, intergenerationality will require collaboration. It will also require greater understanding; perhaps Collaborative Action Teams will form to explore the concept further. It will take much investment, but has the potential to bear orders of magnitude more fruit. Deliberate intergenerationality must be cultivated in every activity and expression of the local church – in worship, cell groups, ministry trips, community engagement, leadership and direction, prayer gatherings, Sunday school, and the rest. And while such activities are part and parcel of congregational life, ultimately this concept comes down to authentic relationships. Believers young and old are longing for such connection, but trust must be built. Strong intergenerational ministry will bring life to the whole body. It will offer value and dignity to seniors who feel discarded, and will help prepare and equip those who are earlier on in their lifelong journey.

The world, the flesh, and the devil seek to drive a wedge between the generations, but the finished work of Christ has joined us all as one. May it be reflected in the life and activity of the global Church!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Content Specialist: Tom McCormick

Facilitators: Ronald Paul Sitompul & Isac Abinmanyu

Affinity Hosts:

Michael Amamieye, Andi Bachmann-Roth, Becky Douglass, JD Gilmour, Leow Wen Pin, Sabrina Siga

Report Author: Jason Mandryk

Jason helps to lead Operation World. He and his wife Becky live in Seoul. Learning more about Global Ageing convinced him that it is to 2024 what Unreached Peoples were to 1974 – a massive blind spot that the Church must wake up to if we are to see significant progress in the Great Commission.