

Boomers' Grown Children Don't Want Their Parents' Treasures

In the News

An article recently appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor* about the grown children of Baby Boomers telling their parents they don't want the Hummels, Thomas Kinkade paintings and other collectibles that the parents accumulated over the years of their marriage but which they must now thin down or part with altogether as they move to smaller quarters.

The grown kids, said the article, "recoil with something close to horror at the thought of trying to find room" for their parents' collections, including complete sets of fine china and crystal. "For their parents, to have a lifetime of carefully chosen treasures dismissed as garage-sale fodder, can be downright painful."

The reality is that this is nothing new: Baby Boomers are not known for taking over their own parents' collectibles either. Tasks differ. Styles differ. Times differ. What percentage of Boomers were eager to take their parents' Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby record collections?

It's not unusual for parents and children to have different interests. In addition, financial status varies. In a healthy economy, people in their 20's tend to have lower incomes and net worth. These both tend to increase as they get older, reaching a peak when they reach their 60s, after which earnings and net worth decline as people leave the workforce. Thus, the younger ones are just starting out, with less space and more immediate needs, just when their parents are starting to downsize.

Many of today's millennials are not even interested in keeping the awards, trophies and other memorabilia from their own high school days, which their parents have carefully boxed and stored in the attic for them. When the kids do eventually look at that stuff, it's often while taking it out to the trash.

"Millennials are living a more transient life in cities," says Scott Roewer, 41, a Washington professional organizer. "They are living their life digitally through Instagram and Facebook and YouTube, and that's how they are capturing their moments. Their whole life is on a computer; they don't need a shoebox full of greeting cards."

Another factor is lack of space. A larger percentage of those in their 20's are burdened with very high college debt, which paid for degrees that produced little or no increased earning capability. Starting one's productive work life with a large debt and low earnings means living in a smaller space: less room and wall space for their parents' collectibles.

Note: These articles and discussions about them tend to use imprecise names such as "Boomers" and "Millennials" to label people by group and then stereotype individuals with the group label. While there are shared characteristics and even outcomes, people remain individuals, not merely group members.

As Episcopalians, we pass many traditions and customs down from generation to generation. As Redeemerites, we pass down certain assumed values. What should we expect the next generation to do with our traditions, customs, and values?

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 5-6

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ... a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away.... (For context, read 3:1-8.)

Question: How do you determine when it is time to gather, when it is time to keep and when it is time to throw or give things away? How do we handle this kind of change, or lack thereof, within the church?

Joshua 4:1-3, 5-7

The LORD said to Joshua, "Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, and command them, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight.'" ... Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, one for each of the tribes of the Israelites, so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever." (For context, read 3:14--4:13.)

As far as we know, the biblical culture, and particularly the nomadic Hebrews of Joshua's time, were not memento collectors. Nonetheless, they had cultural mementos -- or, more specifically, memorials -- to mark in their collective memories the help given to them by the Lord.

Questions: Do you suppose subsequent generations of children assigned the same value to the memorial stones as did their parents? How do we memorialize things within the church? Is this the right thing to do?

Luke 12:20-21

[Jesus concluded his parable:] "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God." (For context, read 12:16-21.)

This is from Jesus' parable about the landowner who had a bumper crop and decided to build bigger barns to house them. For our purposes today, notice the question God asked the man: "And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

The man was not rich toward God and so wasn't prepared for death, but it is possible to be rich toward God and still have to deal with the question of "And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" -- especially when our offspring don't want them.

Questions: In what ways is your sense of self related to the items you've collected? In what ways are the customs and things we've collected in the church related to our identity as Redeemer?

Ecclesiastes 2:18-19

I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me -- and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. (For context, read 2:15-23.)

From the tone of these verses, we can almost imagine the author of Ecclesiastes uttering this as he was watching his children haul his collection of Persian figurines off to a yard sale rather than treasuring them themselves.

Ecclesiastes uses the word "vanity" a lot. It's a translation of the Hebrew word *hevel*, which means something closer to "mere breath." The Message renders these two verses as follows: "And I hated everything I'd accomplished and accumulated on this earth. I can't take it with me -- no, I have to leave it to whoever comes after me. Whether they're worthy or worthless -- and who's to tell? -- they'll take over the earthly results of my intense thinking and hard work. Smoke."

Questions: What things in the church do you feel may be rendered worthless by the next generation? Are there certain physical things within Redeemer that you feel **MUST** remain integral?

Prayer for the Parish (BCP p.817)

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*