

Have I mattered? Can I still?

These questions drew men together in a retreat on generativity in later life.

This Mennonite Men gathering for men in the second half of life was held at The Hermitage retreat center in southern Michigan on November 1-2. John Kotre, Ph.D., author of *Make It Count, Outliving the Self*, and the PBS series *Seasons of Life*, led the retreat based on his work as Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Michigan—Dearborn.



John observed that “There’s a creativity that lies between the generations, touching everything from genes to values. We are not mere conduits to the future, blindly passing legacies through. We shape what comes to us, and we have an obligation to shape it well.” This is the task of generativity— as mature adults to shape what we leave after us for the next generation.

What we create in the generative process, John claimed, “may flow from our roles as parents, teachers, citizens, workers--or volunteers who simply want to give back. The possibilities are endless: a family quilt, a technical breakthrough, a neighborhood organization, a movement or religious reform. Our creation may be as tangible as a cathedral or as formless as a relationship. The work may take months or years--or decades.”

Through storytelling and group conversations, John led us in several sessions, inviting us to consider what we create that matters, makes a difference, or gives back to the world.

We learned that we can't create for the future unless we awaken and talk to the past. We acknowledged that both blessings and curses come down the generational chain. So we examined what has been sown in us, both creative and destructive.

We considered how to pass along what is good, redeem what was painful, and, as "intergenerational buffers," stop what is harmful.

Understanding that what becomes of what we sow is outside our control, we were invited to let go of our attachments and expectations.

We were encouraged to recognize that...

- Nothing is too small to leave behind,
- Even a smile can save a life,
- We see little of what we leave behind.

We enjoyed time in the woods. Surrounded by trees, we considered the example of mature oaks— what they contribute to their ecosystem, that they stand in succession from generation to generation, and how their acorns seed the future.



As seen in this photo, we are like the large, mature white oak in the background—soon to decline and give way to its seeding in the foreground.

As mature men holding our acorn, we were invited to tend...

- What has been sown in our life,
- What we are sowing in the lives of others,
- How we are contributing the world,
- Ways we are seeding the future.

