

Intergenerational living

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I'm walking through my neighborhood, taking inventory of the houses here, as I always do. My mother is a healthy seventy year old who zumbas three times a week (I learned from my mom that "zumba" is a verb), but since the mortality rate in our country remains a stable 100%, I'm pretty sure she'll be slowing down some day.

So, I walk around the blocks, sizing things up, in the hopes that we can find a beautiful little home for her, close by so that I can take care of her when she can't always take care of herself.

Of course, there's the possibility that she'll be living with us, so we made sure that we would have an extra bedroom when we picked out our home. I know many times people have to put their parents in a nursing home. I have instructed my daughter that she needs to put me in one, guilt-free. But, a nursing home seems exorbitant in our case. I have a husband who gets along with my mom and a mom who doesn't have major health issues. We both work at home, so taking care of my mom makes the most sense. Plus, I'm a pastor who has spent substantial hours in different homes for the last 15 years. They can be beautiful places, and they can be difficult. Some people love them; other people sit in desperate loneliness.

So, if we can, we're going to do it the old-fashioned way—intergenerational living. After all, the way of the past seems to be the way of the future. And why not? Communal living makes sense. People are living longer. Why would someone have an empty bedroom, and no one living in it? Shouldn't we be better stewards of our resources? Why put more burden on the environment? Plus, our growing sense of autonomy seems to be doing terrible things to our mental health. Loneliness, depression, and anxiety have increased as we have made autonomous living a greater priority.

It's easy to make the case with my mom, but it's so much harder to make the case with the next generation—or what the NYT obnoxiously calls the ["Boomerang Kids."](#)

First, a 27-year-old woman is not a “kid.” Second, that “kid” is going to be in charge of your future when you’re too old to balance your bank account. So, maybe it’s time for us to have some respect, understanding, and get used to the idea of intergenerational living.

We have given our young the shaft in our country. Funneling tax breaks to the richest, we’ve allowed the income gap widen, creating such a huge chasm that economic mobility for the young is rare. We’ve taken away state funding away from universities, so that the debt burden for the cost of education resides with students. We haven’t invested in our infrastructure for so long, that many of our roads, bridges, and buildings are crumbling. And we’ve basically maintained two educational systems, making sure that a percentage of our public schools are in good order, and leaving all kinds of other children behind.

And now, we complain when a son or daughter, with 37K of college debt, can only get a job bagging groceries and decides the best thing to do is live in one of her parents empty bedrooms.

We’ve had family farms. We’ve had family businesses. We have worked and lived intergenerationally for many years. We had a small blip, where independent living became more of a norm, but now it may be time we go back to sharing our homes and resources. Is that such a terrible thing?

Our faith communities are often the only places in our society where we learn to think intergenerationally. We have a chance to care for one another from cradle to grave. In the challenging times ahead of us, I hope that our churches can continue to be places where we understand the unique positions of the young, old, and everyone in between.