

My wife and I recently returned from a trip to Italy. It was wonderful in every way! Lots of sights seen, lots of history learned, lots of good food eaten, lots of fun with our friends who traveled with us, and lots of stories to tell!

Many of those stories center on being lost – both physically and otherwise. It was a strange land for us and we did not know the language. More than once we had to rely on strangers who did not speak our language to give us directions. More than once we ate “mystery meals,” because we were not sure of the ingredients, and the wait staff was not sure what we were asking. We had fun trying to figure out what we were doing! Were we on the right road? (Sometimes we were!) Did we order what we would like? (Mostly we did.)

As we were flying home recalling the trip, it occurred to us that what was cause for fun and laughter for us is often a cause for sadness and distress for others. I suddenly remembered a woman who had recently entered Wesley Village, our Retirement Village. She was struggling with adjusting to a “foreign” setting, to a “different language.” The familiar terrain of her life was gone and she was looking at a landscape that was strange. She said, with a sense of being lost and fearful, “Nobody has a road map to getting old.” There was no excitement in her voice, no anticipation!

This sense of being in a strange land is a common experience of the aging. Those of us doing ministry with/for these people have a challenge before us. We are called to affirm the sense of being lost, validating their feelings, even as we witness to a hope that the sense of being lost will give way to a feeling of being at home. We are called to Christ-like empathy, sharing their feelings with them; even as we are called to Christ-like hope that a redemptive God will be present in the moment and in the unfolding future. How we do that is as different as our personalities and those for whom we care. But that we do that – holding legitimate feelings in tension with Christian hope – is essential!

Jim Stinson  
Consultant, Older Adult Ministries