

Care Offers Independence, Dignity, Choice

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We have a governing philosophy of care at The United Methodist Homes called Planetree. It is relationship centered, focusing on all areas of connection in the lives of our residents. We pay attention to family members, staff members, other community members, as well as the individual residents, firmly believing that when any of these relationships are weak, the residents' health and wellbeing suffer. One of our guiding principles is expressed in three words: independence, dignity and choice. These words guide what we do with each individual resident and how we do it.

Our goal is an environment in which each resident, despite his/her limitations, is seen as a unique individual who needs to be valued as such. Thus our question is always, "Does this approach, this program, this activity, reflect that goal? Is each unique person afforded the opportunity of making choices, of choosing menus and meal times, deciding when to go to bed, when to get up, of having a wide variety of activities from which to choose, of even being able to choose if he/she will participate in any activity." This concern for independence, dignity, and choice extends to spiritual care and growth, as well as being able to choose specific medical care and physicians. It is a tall order that is not always filled, but it is a goal to which we're working, and toward which we've come a long way.

One of the questions frequently asked as I visit churches, preaching and leading workshops centered on ministry with/to older adults is, "How do we get started?" A corollary to this question is, "What are the goals of such a ministry; where do we focus?"

Ministry in Jesus' name—in the name of one who saw the person beneath the circumstances, who saw the potential in his disciples long before they did, who saw Zacchaeus as something more than a tax collector, who saw Mary Magdalene for who she was, rather for what she did—is ministry that begins with total respect and acceptance. The principles guiding Planetree are valid in any ministry with older adults. There is no single way to create such a ministry, no one set of programs to institute. But there is a guide; it is the way of Jesus—the way of acceptance and love of the other.

So, ask yourself these questions regarding your ministry with/to an individual or group of older adults in your congregation and community.

- Am I, are we, seeing the person, rather than a category of people, as plans for ministry are being made?
 - Is the individual, with his/her specific needs and likes and dislikes, being taken into account?
 - Is there room for the person to make choices, or is it a pre-packaged approach?
 - Does the person(s) receiving the ministry feel valued?
 - Is the ministry allowing the person to claim his/her inherent dignity and sacred worth?
- Independence, dignity, choice: Ingredients for a successful, effective ministry!