

Honoring the Story –

“I don’t know why God has allowed me to live this long. I’m of no use to anyone.”

I cannot guess how many times I’ve heard this sentiment expressed. The “Lone Ranger” in me reflexively wants to ride in on my white horse and rescue the one caught in such a sad, lonely state. But the other side of me knows that nothing I say or do will change how the person feels. Any one – including older adults – have a right to feel what they feel and a need to safely express what they feel.

How then do I respond? How can I be an effective witness to a faith that finds value in every moment, in every stage of life? I can listen! I can encourage further conversation exploring the person’s life story, allowing that person to discover his/her own reason to be alive. One response our Wesley Village Community (United Methodist Homes) in Shelton has been making to this all too common feeling is the Vital Life Stories Program. In it, volunteers are trained to carefully and intentionally solicit a resident’s life story, writing only what the person offers. The story is then read to the resident who edits it any way he/she chooses. Amazingly as they tell their stories they begin to light up as they discover how full, how meaningful their lives have been so far. When the story is complete, the volunteers are trained to ask: “what do you think the next chapter of your story might say?” Invariably in telling and hearing their stories, they recognize how relationships have played a role in their lives and how they continue to do so. More often than not, residents who began by saying they had nothing to say, having outlived their usefulness discover that if they can identify important relationships in their current situation, that they feel better.

This comes as no surprise to Christians, does it? Relationships define us and give us meaning. Offer those feeling as if their lives are over an opportunity to see the relationships. The Spirit will do the rest!

Jim Stinson
Coordinator of Older Adult Ministries