

He is going to be totally blind shortly. He is understandably upset – angry, frustrated, and feeling hopeless. In fact on my most recent visit with him, he said, “I want was to die, rather than deal with total blindness.” While understanding the feeling, I immediately sensed that he was missing any sense of hope. He could not imagine that life would be worth living when he lost his sight. What he needed more than anything else was understanding and then a witness to the possibilities that would still be there, without minimizing the great loss he was beginning to experience. And so we talked about other wrenching losses he had experienced – losses that seemed overwhelming at the time, but from which he had not only emerged, but from which he had forged a new life for himself. When he began to talk about those experiences, I asked how he had found the strength to get through them. He noted that he felt that “God must have helped me, because I’m not that strong.” “Do you think that God is not going to be there in this change?” I heard his unspoken answer and pray that he discovers that his hope lies in accepting the truth and assuming God will help him through,

Larry Minnix, the president and CEO of AAHSA (American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging), tells the story of a former co-worker, Alberta. At the time of the story, Larry was working at a retirement home. It was the mid-seventies and hospice and palliative care were not as prevalent as they are today. The staff was discussing ways of caring for their dying residents and what they might do differently in this regard. Alberta, a southern African American with a strong accent, offered the opinion that the best they could do was to “hope” people through. She meant to say, “help” people through, but her manner of speaking made it sound like “hope.” Larry says that was, for him, a transformational moment. It became the lesson of a lifetime. He says he came to understand in a new way that “our priority mission is to hope people through this unprecedented time and into an unknown future.”

OUR PRIORITY MISSION IS TO HOPE PEOPLE THROUGH THIS UNPRECEDENTED TIME AND INTO AN UNKNOWN FUTURE.

With all the expected and unexpected changes that come with the aging process, and with all the attendant concerns surrounding them, it is too easy to forget the mission, as it were. It is too easy to get caught up in caring for the physical details of an older adult’s needs and forget that the basic human need, which doesn’t go away with age, is for hope. No matter what else a ministry with the aging is about, it is surely about witnessing to the hope we have in a God who walks every step of the way with us. It is about being with a person in his/her times of trials and faithlessness, not judging, but rather witnessing to our faith in a God of hope. It is never about feeling sorry for a person, rather it is about reassuring the person that come what may, God is still present in our lives, seeking to love us and strengthen us on our journey into the unknown.

Jim Stinson
Consultant on Older Adult Ministries