

I HATE BINGO! I LOVE BINGO!

My brother cannot wait until he can fully retire. He has worked all his life and is now ready to "relax and enjoy." I am "officially" retired, working full-time and have no desire to stop, to "relax and enjoy." My brother is only 15 months younger than I am.

"I hate bingo," says Muriel, a resident at the Wicke Health Care Center. "It's an idiotic game. I wish they would stop asking me to play. I'd rather read a book." "I wish they would play bingo every day of the week," says Mike, a contemporary and fellow resident of Wicke.

What gives? Aren't all people the same as they age? Don't they all have the same needs?

After nearly a year of writing these articles, I have been impressed and grateful by how often I have received mail and phone calls from many of you. Somehow the issues surrounding ministry with the aging hit a responsive chord. I am grateful so many of you read them and find them interesting. What strikes me as I reflect on your comments is a recurrent theme in them. Here are some sample quotations from members of the New York Annual Conference.

"How do you come up with different ideas about the same topic so often?"

"I never stopped to think that there was so much involved in doing ministry with and to older adults."

"I often forget 'older adults' is a catchall category for people that are so varied."

You get the idea! The theme recognizes that (as in ministry with any other age group) ministry among older adults is a ministry with individuals, each with her/his own needs, abilities, levels of faith, and desire. It is a ministry that values persons more than convenient groupings.

We learned a long time ago, for example, that effective ministry with teenagers begins with listening, begins with hearing their perceived needs and desires and responding accordingly. Hopefully as more and more of our members age, we will see more clearly how differently they approach their later years, bringing specific attitudes developed during a lifetime with them. And seeing that, hopefully we will allow older adults to shape the ministry of which they are part. To do anything less is to devalue them and to increase a sense that older adulthood has nothing to offer.

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