

Fred was an interesting guy. He was totally committed to his church. He was friendly and made conversation very easily. It was difficult to know him and not like him. He was talented in so many areas and appeared comfortable within himself. So it came as a great surprise when I discovered that every time he and his wife invited people to their house for dinner (which they did very often) Fred would go into panic mode. Afraid he would not be able to carry the conversation, he would research the people coming. He would find their interests, carefully read the local newspaper and literally take notes on possible things to say and ways to keep the conversation going. I will never understand why this bright, caring, interesting guy felt so insecure. But he did and it made him ill-at-ease in such settings. When in other settings, he was perfectly comfortable and a joy to be with.

“Jim, I’d make that visit for the church, but I don’t know what I’d say. I am not good around old people. Can you give me ideas about what to say?”

If I had a nickel for every such conversation (my Fred conversations) I’d be rich. It speaks to a basic insecurity about dealing with the unknown. My response has always been the same. “Would you plan a conversation with your Mom or grandmother? Go and be yourself. That’s who they want to see and meet.”

Visiting with older adults need not be a worrisome thing. It is a joy and actually quite easy. Older adults are no different than anyone at any age.

They may be hard of hearing – but they still have a need to be heard.

They may have trouble seeing – but they still need to be seen.

They may be slow speaking – but they still need to speak.

What a gift we bring when we allow a visit to be free flowing, listening to the older adult and letting the conversation go where that person needs it to go.

What a joy we enable when we allow the older adult to be seen and heard, rather than a chore we need to accomplish.

So if there is a Fred within you, banish him. Visit unencumbered by an agenda. Let the needs, the concerns, the joys, the sorrows of the moment lead the conversation. You will be enriched by knowing you truly visited with another person of worth, and they will be also.