

It's All About Dying, Isn't It?

BY REV. JIM STINSON, Consultant on Older Adult Ministry

Recently a Wesley Village resident asked me that question. She asked because we have experienced more deaths than usual on our campus in recent weeks and she knew my position led me to be involved in one way or another with each of those deaths. The question startled me! I am not naïve. As we age, death looms closer, sickness and frailty often preceding it. I am aware of the frequency with which death makes its appearance in our community.

But I am also aware that life always involves dying at some point and that our population is one of largely older people. But, even after nearly nine years as the Director of Spiritual Life for the United Methodist Homes, I do not believe it's all about dying. In fact, I believe just the opposite. "It's all about living."

While we have breath, we have life! It is a precious gift, too precious to be wasted fretting about the things we cannot change, too precious to be wasted bemoaning all the "things I used to be able to do." Far better—is it not—to do all the things I can still do, all the things I never had the time to do before, but for which I now have time. Regardless of our age, physical condition, or medical diagnosis, if we busy ourselves, our hearts, our minds, with the business of living, each day offers new possibilities.

Far too often, "It's all about dying" becomes the lie that governs our lives as we age. I have had the privilege of observing people who adopted the truth ("It's all about living") as the governing principle of their lives as they aged. To a person, they were happy and contented, sharing themselves in whatever way they were able with those around them. They were a joy to know and to be with. Many of them were housebound, but made phone calls to their equally housebound friends, many wrote notes to faraway family and friends, some adopted new hobbies, and the list goes on. All of them accepted the reality of their physical abilities with grace and nonetheless remained vital until the very end.

Ministering with, and to, older adults is largely about encouraging and enabling this attitude, an attitude by the way that bears witness to the message of Jesus: I have come so that you might have life! We do our older adults a disservice not to challenge them to see "it is all about living."