

*"You don't have to live like this, Pop.  
Live with one of us," they say.  
"There's room. We'd love to have you."  
What can I say?  
I sound stubborn, ungrateful,  
but I don't want to leave this place.  
I'm lonely, sure.  
But there's nothing they can do about that.  
(from A Place of My Own by Elsie Maclay)*

Perhaps there is no more terrifying experience for an older adult than having to leave familiar surroundings, a house filled with memories, "artifacts" of a life, a street filled with friendly faces and the like. And perhaps there is no more terrifying experience for an adult child than having to leave that parent in familiar surroundings. One fears the loss of control, the "downsizing" of memories, the physical affirmation that "I am entering the last phase of my life." The other literally fears for the safety and well being of a parent, now less capable physically and often mentally. It is a case of competing fears! The question is "how do we deal with the situation in a way that answers both fears? There likely is no perfect answer or way around this dilemma. But experience reveals that workable solutions are available. These solutions are dependent upon so many factors, all of them situational. No one answer is right for everyone.

How "unsafe" is the older adult in reality? Are other caring adults (who are not emotionally attached to the person) seeing the same dangers and problems?

How limited is the person? What does the doctor say? Would an aide help?

Is living with an adult child better than an assisted living situation? Has the relationship between the two been such as to support the living arrangements?

Whose need is being met? Is it about the adult child's peace of mind more than about the care and comfort of the parent?

Tough questions! But without careful, prayer filled, attention to them many avoidable problems arise. Small groups exploring issues of aging, Biblical understandings about aging and family dynamics (preached and taught) help prepare young and old for facing aging. Supportive church ministries to/with older adults go a long way in helping the process, regardless the decision to move "Mom" or to leave her in her home.

Caring for an older adult is a difficult task. But being an older adult is also a difficult task. How much better for everyone if we wrestle with the issues before they arise? Who better to lead us to clearer, practical applications of our faith in such matters than the church?

Jim Stinson  
Coordinator of Older Adult Ministries