

"I'm so tired of being a parent to my parent. It is not natural and it leaves me tired and feeling guilty." Anyone with an aging parent or loved one who is reaching, or has reached, the state of needing assistance with daily routines and medical needs understands this cry.

"My daughter (son) forgets that I'm the parent and makes me so angry when she (he) treats me like a child." Any aging person who needs another person to step in and "do for me what I once did for myself" understands this complaint.

Yet life brings with it times of independence and times of dependence! Life brings us to circumstances that require different levels of assistance. All too often these times bring family dynamics to stressful points. The adult child *knows* the parent needs help! The parent *knows* help is needed but is resentful when it is provided. Is there a way beyond this reality? Recently a case assessment and case manager who specializes in elder care told me of an insight she received at a training session she attended. She said the speaker suggested that *partnering a parent* rather than *parenting a parent* was a better direction, one that too many adult children do not take. I'm not sure of all that might mean! I do know that just the attitude suggested by the word *partnering* has a soothing effect. It suggests control over one's life is still possible. It suggests that the older adult is still valued for her opinion. It suggests to the older adult that he is not alone in his efforts to deal with the changes in his life and that he still has a say in how to respond to them. It suggests to the adult child that Mom or Dad are still wanting to do the "parent thing" of making life easier for the child.

There are lots of other implications, some of which I'm still pondering. But the change in words speaks volumes about our perception of the aging process. With *parenting a parent* there is the sense of having one more task added to an already busy schedule. With *partnering a parent* there is the sense of being creatively involved in a changing, yet on-going relationship.

How helpful it would be if churches would explore this insight with older adults and their children, especially if they did so against the backdrop of the biblical teaching to *honor your mother and our father!* How helpful it would be if UMW and UMM groups would grapple with this insight! How helpful it would be if pastors and other pastoral care people would be alert to those in their churches who see caring for their aging parents as an added chore rather than an opportunity to deepen a most important relationship!

Amazing how a change in words can bring new understanding and a change in attitudes! *Partnering* leads me down a different path than *parenting*. It feels right, especially as I enter my "senior years." For it is how I already know I would want to be treated.

Jim Stinson
Consultant on Older Adult Ministries