

'Re-Membering' Can Help Ease Losses

By JIM STINSON

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“Jim, everything is all set for Thursday at 7 a.m. We’re looking forward to hearing you in the Student Center.”

“Doug, back up a little. What Thursday? Why 7 a.m.? What Student Center? Why and who is expecting me? What am I supposed to be doing?”

“Did you forget or did I forget to ask you? You’re the speaker for the Town and country breakfast at annual conference. We are expecting you to bring us a message entitled, ‘Issues of Aging.’ ”

“Well Doug, I think we just identified a key issue of aging. I don’t remember you asking. But I’ll be glad to get something together.”

That phone call came late on Tuesday afternoon, less than a day before I would be leaving for the conference.

Thursday came, the presentation was made, all was well! In fact, the issue of remembering featured prominently in the presentation. But it was not about remembering in a cognitive sense. It was about remembering in a “putting back together” kind of way.

About a year ago, a woman came to live at one of our United Methodist Homes’ assisted living facilities. In our first meeting, she told me her decision to do so came as a result of her husband’s death a few months earlier. “I felt like I had lost my right arm, she said. “It was such a helpless feeling.”

That woman felt dismembered. She experienced brokenness. That is a very common feeling among older adults. As the years pass, so much in life as they knew it has been lost. There is often a feeling of dismemberment, of helplessness.

A major task of those who minister with and to these folks is to point them toward ways of re-membering. It is the task of enabling and encouraging them to find new friends, new things to do that brings meaning to their situations, new direction to their days. It is not an easy task and is often met with resistance. But it is the task of anyone engaged in Christian ministry. It is one way of offering salvation (wholeness), the gift at the core of our faith. The thief on the cross cried, “Jesus, remember me” – so do many of our older adults. The Christian is always called to witness to the reality that every person can be re-membered.