

## **Help Elderly Rid “Veil of Helplessness”**

By Jim Stinson, Consultant on Older Adult Ministry

The opening words of the article left me saying, “Wow!” The words? “After two years of living behind a veil, Charla Nash revealed on TODAY the new face that science has given her, a visage that replaces the one mangled in a vicious attack by a friend’s pet chimpanzee that left her without a nose, eyes or lips.”

We all remember the story; it was truly horrific. Seemingly there was no hope for her to ever having a “normal” life again. She had been robbed of that in that terrible incident. Or so many of us assumed! But thankfully, we were wrong. Through the miracle of modern science and medicine, Charla has the opportunity at a new life.

As Linda Carroll, the reporter, said, “Once again she has a nose and lips. Once again she may be able to do the simple things we take for granted: to literally smell the roses, to taste her food, and to breathe through her own nose. Her first meal after the surgery: Eggs and cream cheese.”

How can we not say, “Wow?”

For those of us who remember our seminary training, the meaning of the word apocalypse carries with it the sense of removing a veil. In that sense Charla Nash has had an apocalyptic moment. Her experience calls us to look again at the underlying message of apocalyptic passages of scripture—the message of a new life always being possible, no matter the circumstances. To see that possibility requires the removal of a veil, the removal of our inability to see God’s promise clearly, as we are.

Isn’t that the work of the Church, of the Christian community, to equip each other to remove our veil, to look at the promise of God clearly, the promise of new life?

Isn’t that a large part of our ministry to and with older adults?

So often growing older brings so many losses and changes in our abilities that we no longer see the possibilities before us. So often it leads us to veil who we really are and who we can still be behind a mask of helplessness. Helping older adults to live up to their full potential requires a ministry that challenges them to remove the “veil.” Not to do so is to fail in our witness to the message of new life always being possible.

It’s always possible to smell the roses, to experience the joy of the moment, but not if we dim our vision with a mask. Be apocalyptic! Help others see clearly! Help enable them to remove the veil.