

Sharing “Burden” of Truth May Offer Freedom

By JIM STINSON, Consultant for Older Adult Ministries

“I don’t like being a burden to my children. That’s the most difficult thing about being old and frail. I need so much help and they get the burden of being that help for me.”

If I had a penny for every time someone has said that to me, I’d be a rich man. No one likes being a burden for someone else. It hurts to feel that way and often leads to frustration and despair, making an already difficult situation more so. In fact that thought often complicates the healing process, slowing it down, sometimes bringing it to a halt.

I got to thinking about the numbers of people who have shared such a sentiment with me. It has always given me pause, wanting to say the right thing, but fearful of sounding trite and dismissive if the wrong words are used.

“You’re not a burden! We’re happy to be able to help you!”

“Think of all you have done for us, it’s your turn to get the attention.”

“Don’t feel that way, we’re not complaining.”

And the list goes on of words I have heard adult children say to their parent or loved one, and of words I have used myself.

When I’ve had the opportunity to follow up with the person needing attention, it is almost always the same response. “I know my kids mean well, but I also know I am a burden. My needs take them away from their spouses and their family. There is no way that is not burdensome.

The hard truth is that caring for someone you love can and does (at times) become burdensome. And, the person needing care knows it. It disrupts life routines, making an already busy life style even more so. Pretending otherwise only adds to the sense of guilt for being needy. And so I wonder, would it not be better to listen to the person feeling this way and affirm what they already know to be true? Would it not be better to say something that acknowledges the facts, but shares the feelings? For instance, how about words to this effect?

“There may be times when your needs will be a burden, but I want to care for your needs, because I love you and I feel better when I do.”

“I don’t like seeing you this way and feel so helpless unless I can do something to help. Helping you helps me as much as it does you.”

“The truth will make you free!” Free to honestly share feelings; free to show the depth of your love; free to let your loved one know that she/he is not alone.