

## Vision article – STOP

“I feel so guilty, but I don’t know how to stop getting frustrated and angry with Mom. I know it is counter-productive to do so, but she pushes ‘all my buttons.’ She seems to take some perverse joy in getting me upset. I know that it is irrational on my part to feel that way, but I do. My Mom is not a mean woman. She would not deliberately upset me! But she does and I don’t know how to respond when that happens.”

My friend, whose mother is a resident at Crosby Commons (the Assisted Living residence at the United Methodist Homes), speaks for so many of us who interact with older adults. We so much want for them to be content, we want them to participate in various activities, rather than sit at home or in their room ‘doing nothing.’ And as family and caregivers, we get frustrated when the older adult doesn’t do what we ‘know’ they should do to be content. We get angry; they get angry. No one is happy! No one wins! Every one loses! Anyone who has ever interacted with older adults knows how easy it is to fall into this pattern of thinking and behaving. (Parenthetically, we might do well to remember that no one is ultimately responsible for someone else’s happiness, but that is another article.)

My friend wanted some advice. In talking with her about ways to respond when she was feeling frustrated with her Mom the word STOP came to mind. (Subsequently the outline for a workshop on patience in ministry with older adults began to take shape). “When you feel yourself getting frustrated with your mother, just stop what you are doing. Change the topic.

### STOP!

Separate! Separate from the issue that is causing distress, at the moment. Separate fact from fiction. Separate what you legitimately can and should do from what is not really yours to do. Separate your wants from the older adult’s wants.

Think! Think about other options, options that provide choice, options that encourage new behavior, rather than sound like demands. Think about how you would feel if someone told you what you must do. Think about whose needs are being met.

Organize! Organize your thoughts so that you can offer them as part of a discussion that respects the person’s need for independence and choice.

Present! Present your ideas in a non-defensive way, in a way that acknowledges the older adult may see it differently than you do.

STOP! A good thing to remember! It just might open doors to communication and new insight for everyone.

Jim Stinson  
Consultant on Older Adult Ministry