

Tech-Savvy Ways May Isolate Older Adults

By Jim Stinson, Consultant on Older Adult Ministry

Sound bites! Who knew this expression would gain such wide usage? It speaks to the language of social media where many words are not even fully spelled out—brevity and the sense of rushing being deemed more important than taking the time to truly speak to one another. It speaks to a time where many communicate in one or two words.

Later!

Gotta go!

Call me!

It may be one approaching a milestone birthday who muses about such things. I'm not sure. But nonetheless I miss the days of phone calls. Texting is not as satisfying. I miss postcards and letters. E-mail (which I use daily) somehow feels less personal than a letter someone actually wrote and signed and which doesn't go to who knows how many other people.

In such musings, I think of all the older adults I know and love. With rare exception this is a strange environment, this environment of short, terse messaging. I hear them complain about how they miss the long hand-written letters, the personal phone calls.

One of them commented that she felt she was imposing when she asked the church she has belonged to for years to send the church newsletter and other information the "old way."

"It seems as if my church has forgotten me," she said. "I don't have access to a computer, nor do I know how to use one."

Another showed me, with great disdain, "This damn machine my daughter bought me." She says it will allow her to stay in touch more readily and save her the time of phoning or visiting. Do you know how that makes me feel?"

Our congregations are full of older people, many of whom do not feel at home in this new environment. Many adjust wonderfully to it. Others either cannot or will not. Either way is rife with the possibility of increased loneliness and the sense of having "lived too long."

Those of us who are involved with ministering to and with older adults do well to remember that, just as we try to stay relevant by adjusting to the new ways of a younger generation, so too, we need to remain relevant to our older population. As is probably always the case we need to minister in more than one world at a time.

In the spirit of sound bites and terse messaging: "Have a happy!"