It has been a tough couple of years for Bessie. She has been widowed; her siblings have died, as has her daughter. On top of all that, she has moved from her own home to our assisted living apartments. In just a short span of time, her life has completely changed. Not an uncommon story! Aging is always accompanied by a great deal of loss. What is uncommon is that Bessie is usually smiling, usually engaged in activities, often in a service mode. Bessie loves to do for others.

I talked to her recently as she was busy crocheting a shawl which she is making as a member of our prayer shawl ministry. She said, "I love to do this. It makes me feel good to be able to help someone else. Besides it keeps me from dwelling on my own problems. I think about them while I'm crocheting, calling Bingo, or whatever, but they don't seem as big or important when I'm doing something helpful to others."

Bessie is 90+ years old and speaks volumes about ministry with and to older adults. All too often we do not challenge them to remember that we are called to serve. Age may change the ways in which we can serve, but it does not eliminate the call to do so. We make a mistake when we "cater" to their every need, if they are capable of meeting their own need. We create a sense of entitlement that minimizes their capabilities, and leads to low self-esteem at best, and angry, demanding people at worst.

Effective ministry with and to older adults begins when we challenge them to do and be the most they can, when we challenge them to give their time and talent in service to others. Doing so does not erase or minimize the losses of age. As Bessie knows all too well, the losses are real. Some physical, some emotional, some spiritual! All must be affirmed as part of the reality. But as Bessie also knows, serving, helping others, volunteering, puts our lives in better perspective. Bessie would tell you that! Her quality of life, if I may make an observation, is far better than some around her who do almost nothing for someone else and spend a good bit of their time "moaning and groaning" about their lives.

So look at the way you and your church congregation, as well as the families represented in that mix, are engaged in ministering with older adults.

Ask:

> Are we doing for, rather than with?
> Are we challenging them to serve others in whatever way they can?
> Are we engaging them as partners in ministry rather than objects of ***our*** ministry?
> Are we conscious that the Gospel call to service does not come with an age limit?

Your ministry will be truer to the Gospel!

Jim Stinson
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