

Turning Endings Into New Beginnings

BY JIM STINSON, Consultant on Older Adult Ministries

Endings Before Beginnings. That is the subtitle of an essay written by David Powell. His essay, "Living in the In-Between," is in the Fall 2010 issue of *Center Sage*, a resource for people working in older adult ministries. Almost daily, I become aware of someone at Wesley Village who is struggling with some powerful endings in their lives. Leaving a home they love; seeking to recover from the loss of a loved one—a spouse, a child, a good friend; leaving friends behind; and receiving a difficult diagnosis from the doctor are but a few of these experiences shared by many as we age.

David Powell says something profoundly true, but which many in the midst of change will find difficult to believe. At first blush, it sounds trite and easy. Yet experience has taught me that it is absolutely the truth for those who dare to believe, and act on it. What he says is: "We need to let go of 'what is' so something new can be born." It is the same sentiment expressed in the classic play and movie, "The Sound of Music." As Maria prepares to leave the convent, the Mother Superior tells her, "Wherever God closes a door, somewhere He opens a window."

Both David Powell and Mother Superior speak to each of us as we confront the closing of doors in our lives. It is so easy to see endings as final. Yet if we use the gift of memory to reflect on other endings in our lives, we can discover how we moved on from them and found beginnings. Somehow we found ways to cope with situations that once seemed impossible. Somehow we are still here, living the life we have.

I believe that the best way to move from an ending is to believe we have the capability of finding and claiming hope in even the worst of circumstances. It is in knowing that we all have been gifted with the ability to do the best we can at any given moment, and in so doing, to live in that moment—letting go of fear and despair, and thus finding our way to a new beginning. The hymn, "Amazing Grace," says it best: *Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*

My insight? Anyone doing ministry with Older Adults needs to be comfortable dealing with endings. Anyone doing ministry in the name of Jesus needs to be comfortable sharing the faith that seemingly began with the ultimate ending; but which, in fact, began with a beginning. People facing endings need to be reminded that every ending can be a beginning.