

*He touched me, O he touched me,
and O the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened, and now I know,
he touched me and made me whole.*
(William Gaither)

How well I remember visiting a parishioner who was dying of AIDS! As I was preparing to leave I asked if there was anything else I could do for him. I still remember his answer! It still sends shivers through my body! "Would you just hold me for a while, no one has done that since I was diagnosed." I sat on the bed and held him as tightly as I could for a 'good long time' as tears streamed down both our faces. As important as this time was for him and for me, his verbal response (matched by a body that had physically relaxed as I held him) has left the deeper impression on me. "Thank you, I already feel better! I was feeling abandoned by everyone, including God. I don't feel that way right now."

Study after the study has demonstrated the importance of touching and being touched for the young and the old and the people in between. It still amazes me that the simple act of holding someone restored his sense of God's presence. It amazes me even more that we sometimes forget that in our ministry!

We are called to be the hands of God, are we not?

In this age where we are rightly sensitive to inappropriate touching it is important that we find ways to share a healing touch with those to whom we minister. Especially is this true in ministry to and with older adults. Often they can identify with the dying Aids patient. Widowed, living alone, away from adult children, their need to be touched is neglected. Other than an occasional handshake or hug they lack for physical touch.

How do we provide that in an appropriate manner?

Here are some suggestions that I use, whenever appropriate. I try hard to be aware of a person's comfort levels.

- Holding hands when we pray
- Making the sign of the cross on their foreheads when ending a visit
- Placing my hand on their shoulders as they leave the worship center
- Using scented oil in a blessing of hands ritual
- Training visitors in hand massage
- Hugging older adults
- Taking their hand as I place the communion bread in it

(I would appreciate hearing ones you have found effective.)

Jim Stinson
Coordinator of Older Adult Ministries