



Great EXPECTATIONS

A Newsletter on Expanding Ministry *With* Older People

Dying . . . Older Adults' Worst Fear?

On April 15, 2010, United Press International reported the results of a Harris Interactive survey of 2,939 U.S. consumers. The study, sponsored by Genworth Financial companies, was conducted January 12-15. It is representative of the entire U.S. population of consumers age 18 and older.

The findings may stun us. Here's a sampling: "Ninety-two percent of spouses or partners say they had not discussed all long-term care issues with each other; 95 percent of parents say they had not discussed aging issues with their adult children; and 96 percent say they have never discussed these issues with their parents." In addition, "55 percent fear being a burden on their family, if they could no longer care for themselves," and "24 percent worry they will end up in a nursing home, 12 percent fear they will deplete their savings, but only 10 percent fear dying."

This clarion call sounds an obvious alert to our congregation, the Older Adults Ministry Team, all older adults and everyone who cares about them: Who is listening to these fears and responding to them in love? Also, how can we encourage and support older adults as they overcome their reluctance and more boldly share what troubles them? What needs to be discussed more openly with loved ones regarding long-term care or other end of life issues?

Some possible beginning steps:

- Create an accurate personal profile fact sheet on each person within the congregation's ministry who is over the age of 65. Underscore fears and concerns.
- Equip the pastoral care team, which makes home visits and celebrates home communions, to update each fact sheet after the latest conversation with older folks.
- Broadly publicize through bulletins, newsletters, hallway posters and telephone contacts the openness of all pastoral care professionals and volunteers to respond to questions about shared housing, assisted living, long-term care insurance, compatible roommates, affordable nursing care, nursing home and hospice services.
- Annually schedule adult Bible class, small group and seminar sessions on "Our Christian Approach to Life's Later Years." Arrange for transportation as needed when inviting men, women and couples to participate.

John F. Bettler, in his article "Guidelines from 2 Timothy for Counseling People with Fears" (*Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Winter 1974), illustrates how the apostle Paul helps the young minister Timothy work through his fear. He worried that he would be ineffective because of his youth. Paul's work with Timothy provides a pattern for us.

FIRST, Paul prompts the budding preacher to "fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you" and "be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Timothy's only genuine help does not come from his own resources, but from outside himself, from the "saving grace of Christ Jesus who redeemed him from the enslaving bondage of sin."

SECOND, Paul proposes that he himself, but especially Christ Jesus, is the living example to follow. Jesus vanquished all enslaving fears, not only for Paul, but for Timothy, too, and for all who trust the Savior. "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead . . . for which I am suffering," Paul encouraged.

THIRD, Paul coaches Timothy. He teaches his young colleague how to finish his work. He has been appointed and equipped to engage in the ministry of the word of God he has been taught. So now he is to gain strength, "entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also," "flee youthful passions," "preach the word," and "be ready in season and out of season" that is, at all times. Just do it, Timothy!

The Church at Work

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