

Visions

St. Mark's UMW

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No Boxes, Please

*Conduct yourself with all humility, gentleness, and patience...Accept each other with love.
(CEV) (Ephesians 4:2)*

I have a high school classmate who is dyslexic but was never treated. Therefore, he reads very slowly and has to re-read things several times before he comprehends them. I sometimes help with healthcare and legal documents. He also has a number of chronic diseases that slow him down.

Bob's biggest complaint is that case workers and others who assist him don't slow down and listen to his whole story. Their job is to provide a specific service, and their main concern is whether he qualifies for their specific service. They frequently don't stop to get the big picture of everything he needs to accomplish and whether or not their service is his top priority. When he fills out forms for orthopedists and pain doctors, the forms expect his problem to be pain from a single accident not pain from a lifetime of problems.

Here is another example: Quite a few years ago I heard of a young family that had two problems. They were homeless, and their car needed major repairs. A non-profit agency gave them money to rent an apartment. However, they used the money to fix the car, which really upset the agency's case worker. The case worker had assumed the car could be fixed later, but family chose to fix the car because they could live in the car as well as use it to go to job interviews. This is one example of putting people in boxes instead of finding out the whole story.

Many people put others in boxes without realizing it when they use stereotypes. Do we stereotype all people who are homeless as lazy? Do we expect all youth who don't like school to be troublemakers? Are you, or someone you know, always ready to tell someone who has a problem what to do to fix it? In all these cases you need to get rid of the box where you have stuffed the other person. In order to help them, you need to actually listen to them. You may make suggestions, perhaps by asking questions, but they need to make the decisions on how to live their lives and which problem to work on first. We need to respect their abilities and weaknesses, their needs and their energy levels, and their choices. You may suggest resources that could help them, but it is not your task to make the final choice.

Dear Lord,

Curb our tendencies to tell others how to solve their problems. Guide us support them as they make their own decisions. In Jesus name. AMEN