

Caregiver Sunday, November 15, 2009

Recent statistics indicate that as many as 50 million people in the United States are providing some amount of care for a family member who is chronically ill, has a disability or is experiencing frailty associated with age. Congregations can provide needed support and respite through congregational care teams.

Get suggestions caregiving in your congregation and resources for people who provide care.

Caregiving suggestions

1. If your congregation hasn't formed a care team ministry, now is a great time.
2. Identify caregivers who might not be showing up in services regularly — because caregiving can be a 24-7 activity.
3. Make and take caregiver baskets to people in your congregation who are caretaking. Help them know that they are important!
4. Hold a reception for caregivers, making certain to provide extra support that might be needed to allow caregivers and the family member for whom they are caring to come. Designate someone who can relieve the caregiver at home for a while, if the person for whom she/he is caring cannot travel.
5. Even if your congregation does not have care teams, look for ways to support those who are giving care.

A SUGGESTED LITURGY FOR CAREGIVER SUNDAY

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

for November 15, 2009
or the Sunday of your congregation's choice

Written by Rev. Jeffrey A. Sumner**
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Daytona Beach Shores, Florida

WORDS TO PREPARE FOR WORSHIP

The God who offers care to others—through Jesus Christ, through the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and through loving men, women, and children—now hears the prayers of others who offer care. God offers unconditional love to those who need care themselves. Let us give thanks for those who love and support us in our daily walks.

CALL TO WORSHIP

The one who cared about you before you were born, the one who loved you in your mother's womb, and the one who persistently has never let you go is present with us now. Let us worship God: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

SUGGESTED HYMN

"O Worship the King", verses 1-4 (*The Presbyterian Hymnal*, #476)

CALL TO PRAYER

In our brokenness there are things that we want to say to God. Our world is in a state of brokenness that we want to acknowledge. Let us turn to God in prayer.

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

O God of both the dance and of the lament: where would we be without your steadfast love? We offer the adoration of our hearts for past promises you have unceasingly kept and for the hope we carry for the rest of today and tomorrow. We acknowledge our dependence on you: we break hearts and bones, we break spirits and commandments. Sometimes things happen that are just accidents; but sometimes we do things that hurt you and others. We confess our sins, are sorry for them, and repent of them. Take us once again, in our brokenness, and let us know how beautiful our brokenness is to you. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God loves you; through God's grace you are offered the opportunity for wholeness. And through God's great love in Christ, God came to earth to know our human emotions and

weaknesses; then through Christ, God reconciled the world with heaven! May you have God's peace now, and offer peace to others.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

“O Worship the King”, verse 5 (*The Presbyterian Hymnal*, # 476)

“Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail, in Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail. Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end, our maker, defender, redeemer, and friend.” (“Amen” may be added because this verse directly addresses God.)

PASSING OF THE PEACE

(optional)

SCRIPTURES

(open to selection by ministers)

HYMN

“Precious Lord, Take My Hand” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal*, #404)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

PSALM 23

(Since many people memorize the King James Version, consider using it.)

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION AND THANKSGIVING

God of the wounded: we acknowledge today that there are wounded people among us, and wounded people on our minds. Some have been hurt by critical comments, others by a workplace accident. Some have been hurt in military service and others in automobile accidents; some have two eyes with vision, some have one, and some have none. Some have limited or no hearing; some have limbs that don't work or a mind that doesn't work well. Today we pray for broken people: we pray that, through proper prescriptions- from pills to prayer- and from exercise to changes in diet- that you will give us wisdom when we decide to move toward wholeness. Also today we pray for those who offer care: caring doctors, nurses, and technicians; Hospice staff and volunteers; a mother who rushes a child to an Emergency Room or a father who sits up and soothes a colicky baby. Sometimes grown children become a parent's companion out of medical needs. We acknowledge all who care in the most difficult of times, and we lift them up in prayer. Open our eyes to those who care for us: those close by and those far away; those who are family, those who are friends, and those who admire or appreciate our work. And dear God of grace, remind us that you showed us how to care through Jesus, who cared for broken people every day. To whom can we show our care; who needs to see Jesus through us? Lead us to places of need, and fill our own needs through your love and the love of others. We pray in the name of Jesus, who healed; we give thanks for the gift of your Spirit who comforts and counsels, and we acknowledge that you, O God, created us

for your own delight. May you dance over us on our best days, and cry with us on our worst ones. We pray in the name of Jesus, who came to save. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

“God Be with You” (*The Presbyterian Hymnal*, #540; or some prefer the tune from the 1955 *Presbyterian Hymnbook*, “God Be With You”)

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

Go from this place lifting up your hearts, and looking for ways to show the care and love of God. And as you go: may God the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer comfort and guide you now, and in the days ahead. Amen.

A Caregiver Sunday Idea

Our church, Westminster By-The-Sea Presbyterian Church, has a Prayer Shawl Ministry. Other churches do, too. Most often the shawls are blessed at the birth or baptism of a child, on the occasion of a marriage, or for a person who is sick or dying. A new way a shawl can be used is to lift up a person who offers care: to bless a recipient with the feeling that not only is the church embracing him or her, but God also “puts unfailing arms” around the caregiver. See www.shawlministry.com for more information.

Additional Suggested Hymns from *The Presbyterian Hymnal*

“Jesus, Thou Boundless Love to Me” (#366)
Different hymn texts of Psalm 23 (#170, #171, #172, #173, #174, #175)

Other Sources for Hymns

Sing the Faith (Geneva Press, 2003)
The Presbyterian Hymnal: Complete Concordance and Indexes, by Judith L. Muck (Westminster John Knox Press, 1997)

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A Litany of Prayer for Those Who Offer Care

By Jane Givens, RN, FCN, MAT
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Loving God, hear us now in our petition for all those who offer care to their loved ones:

For the woman whose husband of nearly sixty years has dementia. She is tired and she is fearful that the husband she has lost emotionally and mentally will soon be gone physically some night, if she doesn't "keep watch."

Lord in your mercy, may we know that your love enfolds those who offer care and their loved ones.

For the young man who never dreamed that he would be raising small children on his own, while he struggles with caring for his wife whose brain is damaged from a tragic car accident.

Lord in your mercy, may we know that your love enfolds those who offer care and their loved ones.

For the man whose partner of nearly forty years has continual strokes and has lost the ability to converse. Loneliness and loss of relationship engulfs him daily as he cares for his loved one.

Lord in your mercy, may we know that your love enfolds those who offer care and their loved ones.

For the daughter who wonders where God is when she witnesses her mother's unrelenting pain from cancer. Each month a new tumor seems to appear just as regularly as the medical bills she can no longer pay.

Lord in your mercy, may we know that your love enfolds those who offer care and their loved ones.

Lord, we know that those who offer care have opportunities for rich and positive experiences with their loved ones. At the same time, we know that they face daunting challenges. Lord, we lift to you those caregivers named in our hearts and the hundreds of thousands of caregivers whose names we don't know. We lift to you their circumstances that are unknowable to anyone but you. We lift them to you for the pouring out of your gifts of strength, guidance, and serenity. We pray for respite from anger, sadness, guilt and all other very human emotions that they experience. We are grateful for these special people who are willing to care for loved ones. We know it is hard work. We pray for their ability to meet their deepest and truest selves in the midst of the pain and suffering.

We pray that they may know that not only are you close to them, but that their faith community stands ready to support them through whatever lies ahead. Lord, those who offer care are people who give and give and tend to forget about their own needs of body, mind and spirit. Help them

remember that in order to be healthy, they must learn to *receive* as well as to give care. Help them to be receptive to the love that their brothers and sisters in Christ have for them. May we remember that as your children, we are all called to help each other, especially in times such as these. Thank you for the opportunity to be the servant hands of our Lord, Jesus Christ, in the world today. In Christ's healing name we pray. Amen.

Tips for Care for the One Who Offers Care — YOU!

by the Reverend Donna B. Coffman, RN, FCN
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*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul and with all your mind.
This is the greatest and first commandment.
And a second is like it:
‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself...’”*
Matthew 22: 37-39 (NRSV)

Reflecting on these verses, I believe that God is not *suggesting* that we care for ourselves, God is *expecting* us to do so! Caring for ourselves is not a selfish act. It is the first step toward loving God and others.

Here are a few suggestions on caring for **YOU!**

1. Be kind and gentle with yourself! Whose expectations are you trying to meet? Have you set the bar too high for yourself in your current situation? Is it necessary to have a spotless house or a perfect garden at the expense of your health?
2. Remind yourself that even though your family and others may think you are a wizard and need no help, this is not true! You cannot wave a magic wand and all will be well. However, you **are** the one who can set things in motion or make things possible for concerns to be addressed. With the support of friends, your parish nurse, and your pastor, you can ask for help. You cannot change how anyone else in your family thinks or behaves—you can only change **how** you relate to them.
3. Create a “sacred space” in your home—a quiet place with your favorite chair, a candle, a small flower, your Bible, a favorite picture—anything that reminds you of the gift of God’s peace in the midst of the storm. Use your space daily to help you remain centered. After tough days of caring for people, even Jesus sought a quiet place to pray and get refocused.
4. Give support, encouragement and praise to healthcare professionals and others who assist you. Learn to accept support, encouragement and praise in return.
5. Remember that because of your situation, you are bound to feel helpless at times. Admit it without shame or guilt. Keeping a stiff upper lip is much more harmful to you and your loved one than admitting you are worn out and cannot do more. Contact your pastor or parish nurse for resources that can support you. Allow others to help you. Others may not do it just the way you would, but they can “spell” you for a bit while you have lunch with a friend or

run an errand. If you do not allow others to help you, you may be taking a ministry opportunity away from them.

6. Learn to recognize the difference between complaining that relieves stress and complaining that reinforces negative stress.
7. Use positive language. Say “I choose to offer care.” rather than “I should, I ought to or I have to.” Say “I won’t” rather than “I can’t.” Remember, if you never say “no” to family members or others who place unrealistic expectations or demands upon you, what is your “yes” worth? You do not have to bake that special cake for the family reunion. “We know you are so busy, but you know how everyone just loves your orange marmalade cake!”
8. At the end of the day, focus on one good thing that occurred during the day. Write it in an attractive journal. Another way to hold onto the good things is to start a “Blessing Box.” Write your good thing or blessing on a slip of paper and place it in your box. When the tough times come, pour out your blessings on the kitchen table or in your lap and read them aloud as a way to remember them.
9. Be a resource to yourself! Get creative – try new approaches. Be an “artist” in the way you offer care. Set the table with placements that reflect the season. Use a bright colored pillowcase on the bed. Make a scrapbook of cards from friends and family.
10. Laugh at every opportunity! Rent “I Love Lucy” episodes or other favorite comedy programs and watch them together with your loved one. By the way! Did you know your physical body does not differentiate between real laughter and “pretend” laughter? Just look in a mirror and laugh at yourself! After a few “ha-ha’s,” “hee-hee’s,” and “ho-ho’s,” your endorphins will rise; you will feel better and your body will never know that you were not at a comedy club!

Ideas for use of this article include:

- ♥ church newsletter
- ♥ bulletin insert
- ♥ discussion points for a support group
- ♥ handout for parish nurse, pastor, or spiritual care visitor to offer when visiting in the home or care facility

Resources for Those Who Offer Care— Family Members, Congregations, Pastors, Parish Nurses

Note: Resources will be added periodically. Check back often for the latest update! If you have a suggested resource for those who offer care, please email the Reverend Donna B. Coffman at caresmin@verizon.net

Books

124 Prayers for Caregivers by Joan Guntzelman. Winona, Minnesota: St. Mary's Press, 1995,

Beyond Casseroles—505 Ways to Encourage a Chronically Ill Friend by Lisa Copen. San Diego, CA.: Rest Ministries Publishers, 2005.

Counting on Kindness—The Dilemmas of Dependency by Wendy Lustbader. New York NY: Free Press, 1991. Insights into the emotions your loved one may be experiencing when the time arrives for them to rely on others for help with daily survival. Topics like “The Worth of the Past” (accumulations of memories and “stuff”) are invaluable in understanding this time in life.

From Grim to Green Pastures—Meditations for the Sick and Their Caregivers by Richard Morgan. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1994.

Share The Care—How to Organize a Group to Care for Someone Who Is Seriously Ill by Cappy Capossela and Sheila Warnock. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1995.

Your Best Is Good Enough—Aging Parents and Your Emotions by Vivian Greenberg, New York, NY: Lexington Press, 1989. Written for adult children who are loving and dependable caregivers for their aging parents, but who are overwhelmed and torn by the conflicting emotions of anger and resentment for the demands placed on them and the guilt and shame over what they perceive as selfishness in placing their needs before their parents' needs. A practical and direct book about the most common issues adult children face while caring for their parents.

Websites

www.caregivers.utah.gov/bill_of_rights. The Caregiver's Bill of Rights was created in 1985 by the AARP for those who often lose themselves in providing care. The Caregiver's Bill of Rights is a reminder that those who are offering care have rights, too. This Bill of Rights can be posted where you can see it daily so you can be reminded of the importance of taking care of yourself. You can add to it if you want to include something specific to your situation.

www.caregiverslibrary.org. This website is a treasure trove of information for those who offer care and congregations who would like to explore ministries of care. You'll find free tools such as a driving assessment and a valuable records inventory. Ministry resources include a leader's toolkit for beginning a ministry of care and an extensive list of care ministry programs guides.

www.carepages.com. CarePages is an online community of millions of people coming together to share the challenges, hopes and triumphs of anyone facing a life-changing health event. CarePages helps members and their families connect during and after hospitalization for illnesses ranging from cancer, spinal cord injury, stroke, heart disease to premature birth. It is also the place to be for patients with chronic conditions who want to journal their experience or connect with others facing similar circumstances. Some of these life-changing conditions include diabetes, Alzheimer's and fibromyalgia.

Through free, personalized websites, members can relate their stories, post photos and update friends and family instantly. In turn, people who care can send messages of love and encouragement. The CarePages website also provides unique resources (discussion forums, blogs, articles and more) to educate and guide members through their health journey, as well as give loved ones the tools to offer hope and emotional support when they're needed most. Their mission is to ensure that no one goes through a health challenge alone.

www.nfca.lotsahelpinghands.com. "Lotsa Helping Hands" is a free resource of the National Family Caregivers Association that offers a private, web-based caregiving coordination service that allows family, friends, neighbors and colleagues to create a community and assist with the daily tasks that become a challenge when caring for an aging loved one or during long-term caregiving. There is a calendar for scheduling tasks such as coverage or transportation to medical appointments; a platform for securely sharing vital medical, financial, and legal information with designated family members; and customizable sections for posting photos, well wishes, blogs, journals, and messages. When someone asks "what can I do to help?" the answer is "give me your name and email address" – the system takes over and allows people to sign up and start helping.

www.nfcacares.org. The National Family Caregivers Association educates, supports, empowers and speaks up for the more than fifty million Americans who care for loved ones with a chronic illness or disability or the frailties of old age. NFCA reaches across the boundaries of diagnoses, relationships and life stages to help transform family caregivers' lives by removing barriers to health and well being. National Family Caregivers Month is organized each year by the NFCA and is designated as a time every year to thank, support, educate and empower family caregivers. "This year we are encouraging people to speak up during National Family Caregivers Month." said Suzanne Mintz, NFCA president and CEO. "One of the most important attributes on being an advocate for your loved one is the willingness and the ability to speak up and keep your eye on the ultimate goal, protecting not only the health and safety of your loved ones but for yourself as well."

Praying With Those Who Offer Care:

Suggestions for pastors, parish nurses, and other spiritual care visitors

- ♥ In worship during intercessory prayers, begin naming the one offering care as well as the one who is ill.
- ♥ Take notice of your prayer language. Use positive images where possible—rewarding, hopeful, thankful, grateful, love, peace. Pay attention to how you use words with negative connotations—duty, burden, tired, exhausting, stressful.
- ♥ Organize a Prayer Circle that meets on a regular basis for members who are in a caregiving situation. It can be through telephone, email, or a small group gathering. Trained members of the congregation may offer respite care for their loved ones while the Prayer Circle meets.
- ♥ Create a small, personalized booklet of individual prayers and encouraging scriptures for those in your congregation who are caring for loved ones. Put one prayer or scripture on a page so that there is room for the person to make notes. Alternate prayer and scripture. Places in the prayers where personalization can be done are noted by *italics*.

Some prayer examples are:

- “Awesome God, sometimes we can’t find the words to thank you for being with us. In my case, I don’t know the words. In *Mother’s* case she can’t remember them. But we know that you love us both. Amen.”
- “Loving God, help me to understand that caring for my own needs is not selfish. I wisely take care of me so that I can provide better care for my *child*. Amen.”
- “Ever-Present God, you’re always available to help, but I forget that you often send your help through other people. Don’t let me forget it again. Amen.”
- “Compassionate God, my *husband* remains constantly in my thoughts. Help me to trust you and those who care for *him* at the *nursing home*. I know you care for us all. Amen.”
- “God of the Journey, new places and new things are often hard on us. It’s been especially difficult for my *wife* to adjust. Keep assuring *her* that everything is all right. Help *her* to know that *she* is secure in your hands. Amen”
- “Merciful God, none of us likes to lose anything. Help me to be patient as I try to comprehend the great losses my *husband* is experiencing. Amen.”
- “Faithful God, I am acutely aware that life is a gift from you. I don’t know how long I’ll have this gift. Give me wisdom in planning for my *wife* as I make plans for myself. Amen.”
- “Gracious God, when I consider your compassionate understanding for me, it helps me to be more understanding of my *daughter*. Amen.”

- “God of Remembrance, it hurts when my *son* doesn’t recognize me. I know in my head that *he* can’t, but my heart still breaks. Reassure me that you always know me and my *son*. Amen.”

A few suggested passages of scripture: (*Note—all scriptures are slightly adapted from the NRSV: pronouns have been changed to “God” or “Lord” to emphasize God’s presence with those who offer care.*)

- “For God alone my soul waits in silence; truly, for my hope is from God.” Psalm 62: 5
- “God alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.” Psalm 62: 6
- “Put your trust in God always, person’s name; pour out your heart before God, who is our refuge.” Psalm 62: 8
- “With my voice I cry to the Lord; with my voice I make supplication to the Lord. I pour out my complaint before the Lord. I tell my trouble before the Lord. When my spirit is faint, you know my way.” Psalm 142: 1-3a
- “O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away... You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me...” Psalm 139: 1-2, 5-6a
- Psalm 23
- “May mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.” Jude, verse 2
- “We have this hope (Jesus Christ), a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul...” Hebrews 6: 19
- “It is the Lord who goes before you. The Lord will be with you; the Lord will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.” Deuteronomy 31: 8
- Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11: 28
- Jesus said, “...whoever gives even a cup of cold water...truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.” Matthew 10: 42
- “Cast all your anxiety on God, because God cares for you.” I Peter 5: 7
- “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” John 14: 27a

A Blessing for the Hands of Those Who Offer Care

This ritual of comfort and care may be offered during a visit with a family or may be adapted for use in a service of worship that is used on Caregiver Sunday.

The one who is giving the blessing will need to collect these materials:

- ♥ Unscented oil or lotion—some people have allergies to fragrances.
- ♥ A clean hand towel
- ♥ A small pillow
- ♥ Appropriate music and tape/CD player
- ♥ A copy of the blessing to leave for the family.

Create a sacred space—quiet room, comfortable position for you and the person you are blessing (a pillow on your lap with a clean towel over it can provide a restful place for hands to rest), soft music that calls you both into the presence of God.

Begin by pouring a small amount of lotion or oil into the palm of your hand and rubbing your palms together to warm the lotion/oil. Hold the person's hands lightly in yours for a moment as you talk about what you will be doing. Say a silent prayer for the hands you hold—the work they do, the love they share, the comfort they give, the way those hands have been/will be Christ to their loved one. Then gently take one of the person's hands in yours. Using your thumbs, one after the other, brush upward lightly on the top of the hand toward the wrist. Turn the hand over and repeat the movements on the palm. Beginning with the little finger, gently massage each finger. Stroke the top of the hand. Make circles around the wrist. Repeat the entire exercise on the other hand, using more lotion or oil as needed. When you have completed both hands, hold them in your hands again and offer this blessing:

A Blessing of Hands

May the God who formed these hands bless and guide them as they offer care.

May these hands be blessed as instruments of God's healing love.

May the work of these hands be blessed as they bring peace and comfort.

May these blessed hands feel appreciation for the many tasks they do.

May the touch of these blessed hands express the love of God.

Depression: A Common Concern for Those Who Offer Care

“We must strike a balance between what we do for ourselves and what we do for others, learning to receive as well as to give. For if we only give and never receive, we get out of balance.”

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

It is not uncommon for those who offer care to “get out of balance” and experience times of depression. The major lifestyle changes that come with caring for a loved one with a chronic or terminal illness are often the source of depression. Depression is not unusual in the situation of being responsible for another’s care twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In Psalm 32 King David writes about his depression, “While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long...my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.” (vs. 3, 4b)

Forerunners of depression may include:

- ♥ loss of usual contacts with friends and neighbors;
- ♥ loss of social interaction found in church, civic, social or work activities;
- ♥ a feeling of guilt and a sense of hopelessness in the irreversible decline of a cherished person;
- ♥ sadness about the illness and perhaps impending death of a loved one.

If these feelings are very strong or last for most of the day nearly every day for more than two weeks, they may indicate depression.

Some warning signs of depression you may experience:

- ♥ Changes in the way you feel—
 - You feel sad, hopeless, or guilty most of the time.
 - You feel tired or lack energy.
 - You have thoughts of suicide or death.
- ♥ Changes in sleeping and eating habits—
 - You sleep either too much or too little.
 - Your appetite has changed. You have gained or lost weight.
- ♥ Changes in daily living habits—
 - You have lost interest and pleasure in daily activities.
 - You have problems making decisions or thinking clearly.

If you or someone you know is experiencing any of these symptoms, talk with your pastor, parish nurse, or other healthcare professional about what to do. The sooner you get help, the sooner you will begin to feel better. The longer you wait, the harder the depression will be to treat. Depression can be treated with counseling, medication, or both. Medications for depression that are taken appropriately are not addictive or habit forming. Treatment works gradually over several weeks. If you do not start to feel better after this time, tell your healthcare provider. It may take some time to find what works best for you.