

## **Model Protestant Caregiving Service**

The National Family Caregivers Association (NFCA) is a not-for-profit membership organization striving to improve the overall quality of life of America's family caregivers, those individuals who provide care for a loved one who is chronically ill or disabled.

Because the faith community has a special role to play in helping and supporting caregiving families, NFCA is launching an effort to raise awareness within the faith community about the needs of family caregivers. The program has two components: a religious service to honor caregivers within the congregation/parish setting and a pamphlet of ideas (ranging from easy/no cost to more comprehensive ideas) that your faith community can implement to support the caregivers in your midst.

This booklet contains a guide and time line for putting on a Protestant Caregiving Service and the bulletin for a model service. These materials can be used as a template for putting on your own Caregiving Service or as a starting point for personalizing the service for your community.

The model is based on an Interfaith Service that was the first National Family Caregiving Association Interfaith Family Caregiving Service on November 16, 1998 at St. John's Episcopal Church in Washington, DC.

The service was prepared for that occasion by an interfaith planning group consisting of: a Presbyterian minister, a Rabbi, a Priest, and several lay representatives. Materials for the service were drawn from a number of readings and meditations. Participants in the service included the planning group, the co-founders of the NFCA acting as hosts, a Baptist minister, several family caregivers, a representative of a foundation involved in end of life projects, and a barbershop quartet. This model has been adapted by Protestant clergy and reviewed by the original panel.

The congregation consisted of representatives of sponsoring organizations, family caregivers, people involved with family caregivers, representatives of local congregations, and the general public.

**Service Bulletin**  
**A Protestant Service**  
**in Honor of Family Caregivers**

Music As We Gather

Welcome

*Host*

Call To Be Together

*Service Leader*

Why are we here?

- ... to praise God for life;
- ... to affirm the presence of Christ in our daily caring;
- ... to pray for what we need to fulfill our roles as caregivers and as support persons to caregivers;
- ... to gather strength from the community of persons of faith assembled here and around the country.

Hymn “God, Who Art the Great Creator”

Tune: Austrian  
Words: Schwerdtfeger

God, Who art the great Creator  
and Sustainer of all life,  
Be Thou ever near to aid us,  
Lest we weary in the strife.  
When our steps begin to falter  
May we feel thy guiding hand,  
Go before and gently lead us,  
‘Till we reach the promised land.  
Lifting Burdens

When our energy’s diminished,  
Give us eyes of faith to see  
That the pathway we are treading  
Leads us nearer unto Thee.  
Though we cannot do sufficiently  
All we seek to give and care,  
May we hear Thy voice more clearly  
Saying, “Lo, you know that I am there.”

*Host*

Leader: There is much that burdens us, weighs us down.

People: IT IS TIME TO GIVE IT UP.

Leader: Let us name our fears and our guilt, our longings and our pain.

People: PERHAPS, THEN WE CAN SET IT ALL ASIDE, AT LEAST FOR A MOMENT, AND BE FULLY PRESENT IN THIS TIME WITH ONE ANOTHER.

Leader: Let us pray, trusting in the power of the mysterious “I Am” to receive and accept and transform our confession.

People: O GOD OF COMPASSION AND CARE,

THERE ARE SO MANY TIMES WHEN I FEEL INADEQUATE TO THE JOB OF CARING, SO OVERWHELMED WITH THE ENORMITY OF THE TASKS INVOLVED.

IT IS PARTICULARLY IN THOSE MOMENTS THAT I FEEL I'VE BEEN ABANDONED, FORGOTTEN, TESTED IN SOME ULTIMATE WAY, NOT EQUAL TO THE REALITY THAT STARES ME IN THE FACE.

THERE ARE OTHER TIMES WHEN I AM SURE THAT I AM BEING TAKEN FOR GRANTED, UNAPPRECIATED, PERHAPS NOT EVEN NOTICED.

I HAVE MOMENTS WHEN I KNOW THAT I AM FAILING TO DO ENOUGH AND AM INCAPABLE OF DOING ANYTHING RIGHT.

PATIENCE IS SHORT, ANGER IS AT THE SURFACE. TIRED, ANXIOUS, DISCOURAGED, I LOOK FOR EVIDENCE OF YOUR PRESENCE. WHERE ARE YOU? WILL YOU RESCUE ME? LET IT BE SO, I PRAY, AS ONE WHO SEARCHES FOR YOUR REFRESHING BREATH AND LISTENS FOR YOUR STILL, SMALL VOICE. AMEN

#### Assurance of the Presence of God

Leader: Friends, hear and believe that you are not alone.  
There is a great community of caregivers who share your guilt, fear and pain. And, there is that still, small voice that resides in each one of us, that assures us that we are forgiven, understood, affirmed in our humanness, loved unconditionally.

People: YES, WE HEAR THAT VOICE DEEP WITHIN OUR INTERIOR AND ECHOED THROUGH THE CANYON WALLS OF OUR NETWORK OF SUPPORT. FOR NOW, WE SET ALL THIS ASIDE, FREE, EVEN MOMENTARILY, OF THE WEIGHT THAT WE CARRY. THANKS BE TO GOD!

Leader: Gather new energy in this freedom.  
Get in touch with a sense of lightness and buoyancy.  
Marvel in the slate being wiped clean.

People: FAITH PROMISES SUCH MYSTERIOUS ACTION.  
MAY IT BE SO!

Singing with Thanksgiving

Tune: Old Hundredth (Doxology)

Words: Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise God all creatures here below,  
Praise God above eternally,  
O Spirit God, you set us free!

Readings/Prayer/Response

What follows is a series of readings from the diversity of faith traditions in our global village that focus on important elements in family caregiving. Each reading is followed by a prayer that is spoken by a leader and then a response by all in the congregation.

**A READING ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY  
CAREGIVING**

“To Face Sacred Moments”

by Rabbi Abraham Heschel

Read by ***Reader 1***

“The higher goal of spiritual living is not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments.” Rabbi Abraham Heschel

When God and Moses met on Mt. Sinai, the focus was on what it was that human beings needed in the way of boundaries in order that life could be lived in a purposeful, meaningful way. One of the ten commandments that resulted is this:

“Honor thy father and thy mother so that you may live a long time in the land that I, the Lord God, am giving to you.”

It has been known from the beginning of time that when we all take care of those within our own family circles who need our care, we are showing them respect and honor. Even more, we are opening ourselves, as Rabbi Heschel reminds us, to the experience of sacred moments. When someone in our family is weak, disabled, fragile, vulnerable, sick, aging, dying - the presence of God is often mediated through the family’s care, and conversely, in giving care. May you be blessed as you are a blessing!

Prayer: Set in families to support and nurture, care and love, we pause to name the one for whom we care: \_\_\_\_\_

Gracious God, we acknowledge the privilege of having a family through which to care. Make us mindful of this gift as we give and receive in our families.

People: GRANT US THE UNDERSTANDING THAT WHAT WE ARE CALLED TO DO IS A PART OF YOUR PLAN FOR ALL CREATION TO BE THE RECIPIENT OF CARE, CONCERN, SUPPORT AND LOVE.

**A READING ABOUT THE NEED FOR SUSTAINING ENERGY**

“There is No Place Where God is Not” and Psalm 121

Read by *Reader 2*

It has been said that,

“The same life force that grows an oak from an acorn,  
a mountain from the earth’s molten core,  
a stream from the spring thaw,  
a child from an egg and a sperm,  
an idea from the mind of a human being -  
That same life force is present in all things,  
All thoughts and experiences.  
There is no place where God is not.”

It is the life force that sustains us when our energy for caring seems to drain away.

The psalmist wrote,

“I look to the hills,  
From whence does my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.  
God will not let us fall. God, our protector, is always awake.  
God neither slumbers, nor sleeps.  
God will guard you. God is by your side to protect you.  
The sun will not hurt you by day, nor the moon during the night.  
God will protect you from all danger, keeping you safe.  
God will protect you as you come and go, now and forever.”

There is no place where God is not.  
Let it be so!

Prayer: Our energy runs low; our batteries need recharging. Our fuel tank says empty.

People: GRANT US YOUR SUSTAINING ENERGY THAT HOLDS US UP, THAT  
ALLOWS US TO BE FILLED WITH UNIMAGINABLE  
DETERMINATION.

**A READING ABOUT GRACE IN TIMES OF  
HELPLESSNESS**

“A Word from Paul” - (Galatians 6: 9-10)

Read by ***Reader 3***

The apostle, Paul, wrote to an early gathering of Christians in the Roman Province of Galatia, the following encouraging words:

“Let us not grow tired in doing good,  
for in due time we shall reap our harvest,  
if we do not give up.  
So then, while we have the opportunity,  
let us do good to all,  
but especially to those who belong to the family of the faith.”

It is possible, then, that grace comes to us when we simply and lovingly extend ourselves in giving care -

Care to the one who is giving care  
Care to the one who is receiving care  
Care to the core of ourselves that moves us outside ourselves in order to know the fullness of life.

May it be so, through the grace of God.

Prayer: A brick wall, a red light, a no trespassing sign...

A grim diagnosis, a spat of bad days, a reaction to drugs...  
Increasing dependency, incontinency, loss of memory....

People: WHEN IT SEEMS THAT THERE IS NOTHING LEFT THAT WE CAN  
DO, SEND SOME SIGN OF GRACE THAT THERE IS A POWER  
BEYOND MY UNDERSTANDING THAT RULES THIS UNIVERSE WITH  
LOVE.

**A READING ABOUT COURAGE WHEN CHOICES ARE  
CHALLENGING**

“The Matter of Open and Closed Doors”

by Joyce Hifler

Read by ***Reader 4***

Joyce Hifler has written:

“We have often heard it said that God never closes one door unless God opens another. It is a great comfort to know we never really lose when we believe, for any defeat can be turned to good if we will absorb the lesson in it. And yet, how often we refuse to go through that door that has been opened for us. It is so much easier to stand back and wail about the closed one. There seems to be a certain amount of glorification in defeat. Sometimes a door will close for us because that particular one would have caused us more unhappiness, but it never closes for punishment,

God is love - and love does not punish, nor does it have any power but to give what is right and good for us.

With this knowledge, we walk with grace through those doors that open to us.”

Prayer: How shall we discern sacred will? What resources are there when hard decisions must be made? Can we truly trust in the God’s direction and rest in the assurance of the leading of the Divine?

People: MAY THE MOVING SPIRIT WITHIN US GIVE US COURAGE TO FACE THE HARD DECISIONS AND WORK THROUGH CHALLENGING CHOICES.

### **A READING ABOUT OPENNESS TO RECEIVING SUPPORT AND HELP FROM OTHERS**

Tapestry

Read by the *Service Leader*

Strong and beautiful tapestry can be woven from colorful yarns meshed together within the warp and the woof of the loom. But before the yarn there are the fibers. The fibers must be wound together into the yarn so that the yarn becomes as a community and only from that strength of community in the fibers can the weaver craft the tapestry. So too is it for the craft of family caregiving. A caregiving tapestry woven from a single strand is a fragile canvas.

When approached from a community of family members, an extended family community, a faith community, or a community consisting of neighbors living in proximity, a caregiver can be sustained and renewed in strength to carry forward. An individual caregiver has strength, but a community of caregivers can be spun into yarn even stronger for both the care recipient and the caregiver.

And so it is that if we are all part of a web of life that has intricate interconnections, then it is critical that we open our lives to the power of those

connections and welcome others to fulfill the purpose of the connectedness with us and to those for whom we care. It is then that the secret of happiness can be experienced in its complete circle.

May it be so!

Prayer: We don't have to go it alone! Friends and neighbors, faith kin and community organizations consider it a privilege to be able to contribute to our caregiving. Can we let them in?

People: IT IS SO HARD TO ALLOW OTHERS INTO OUR PRIVATE WORLD. STIR UP IN US, O GRACIOUS GOD, AN ATTITUDE OF OPENNESS TO THE SINCERE OFFERS OF OTHERS, RECOGNIZING THAT EVERYONE WILL BENEFIT AND BE ENRICHED. DRAW US INTO CARING CONGREGATIONS THAT RESPECT AND EMPOWER US TO BE THE BEST THAT WE CAN BE.

#### **A READING ABOUT THE ABILITY TO DO SELF-CARE**

“Infinite Respect”

by Theophane the Monk

Read by *Reader 5*

“Did you ever hear a sermon begin with the words, ‘When I was in heaven?’ That’s how the old monk began his rap with us, ‘When I was in heaven...’

‘When I was in heaven, they gave me a torch with which I could see everything, EVERYTHING! Do you believe me?’ ”

So begins a small parable by Theophane the Monk. The most important thing that the speaker could see was his own interior world. He became intimately familiar with his needs and wants. But, even more, he opened himself to a message from God that said, “Infinite Respect” - respect for others, and, respect for oneself.

Whenever we find ourselves on overload,  
overwhelmed with all that we have to do,  
Crushed by the tasks that pile up in front of us,  
It is important, even critical, to hear the whisper of “Infinite  
Respect” -

and, stop and pay attention to rest, exercise, nutrition, intellectual stimulation, emotional release, and whatever else will indicate that we know how to respect ourselves in order to prostrate before the Holy in the others who are in our lives.

Prayer: When we get appropriate rest, exercise, nutrition, intellectual stimulation, emotional release - we know that we are better able to give care to others.

People: KEEP US MINDFUL OF OUR OWN NEED AS CAREGIVERS TO BE BALANCED, CENTERED, FED AND CONNECTED IN BODY/MIND/SOUL/HEART. WE OFFER THIS PRAYER TRUSTING IN THE POWER OF A MIGHTY GOD THAT IS AT WORK IN THIS UNIVERSE FOR HEALTH AND WHOLENESS, FOR INTEGRITY AND WORTH. LET IT BE SO!

Special Music

Special Message

Recognition of Caring Congregations

*Host*

Offering:

*Service Leader*

This is intended not to be an offering FROM the congregation but, rather TO the congregation. Each will receive a polished rock, along with an explanation of its significance for caregiving.

Caregivers need “rock solid” support systems. Caring Congregations might say “we want to be those rock solid persons you can depend upon.”

Closing Hymn

Share the Caring©

Tune: W Zlobie Lezy (A Polish Christmas Carol)

Words: Margee Iddings

*All:* Share the caring, share responding  
To the needs both great and small  
With a neighbor, with a colleague  
And with family - sound the call!  
Running errands, giving transport, sitting listening, fixing meals -

Help us all to stand up tall.

**All:** Share the caring, share the burden  
That cannot be faced alone.  
Sustained giving, constant attention,  
Leaves one weary to the bone.  
Others long to just be able to give bread and not a stone,  
If the needs are only known.

**Family:** Share the caring, share the blessing  
That becomes a precious gift -  
When a loved one needs our presence,  
Understanding, time and wit.  
When disability or an illness leave one challenged to exist  
Needs enormous then persist.

**Caregivers:** Share the caring, share your loved one,  
Don't hold on to treasured gold.  
Let the circle that surrounds you with their  
Love your lives enfold.  
Don't let feelings of self-sufficiency, unworthiness or pride,  
Make you run away and hide.

**Friends, Members of Congregations, Neighbors, Colleagues:**  
Share the caring, share the privilege  
that unfolds at levels rare  
When vulnerability of being at the core  
Is what we dare.  
Holy places, sacred moments, thoughts so precious to be shared -  
All results of shared care.

**All:** So share the caring, share the privilege  
That's how life was meant to be -  
Not lived alone, in isolation,  
rather in community.  
Mutual kindness, received and given;  
open hearts poured out so free -  
Circle of humanity

Candle lighting:

**Service Leader**

Candle lighting is a symbolic act that reminds us that we gather energy from the Holy Light. Let it remind us of the joy and power there is in the privilege of giving care. May the light be a source of hope when the darkness threatens to overwhelm.

**Reader 2 & Reader 3**

We light this candle to give caregivers the determination to take charge of their lives, to allow caregiving to be a part of it, but not all of it. We light this candle to remind them that there is power in the ability to make choices and by making choices they celebrate their personhood.

We light this candle to let caregivers know they are honored and highly valued, to celebrate the extraordinary efforts that they make. We light this candle as a symbol of the love that they give to others and of the love they need to shower on themselves.

We light this candle as a beacon to lead the way toward the sharing of care that needs to be asked for by caregivers and needs to be acknowledged and offered by others. We light this candle as just one among many to be a source of help for family caregivers.

We light this candle as a tribute to family caregivers who give so much of themselves to loved ones and to our nation, and we light this candle in the hope that on this day and on all days hence America's family caregivers will stand tall and proud and empowered.

Benediction

**Reader 1**

We must often revive the gladness of gratitude  
And retrain our lips to utter words of thanks.

God's gifts often go unnoticed in our haste;  
And disappointments may blind us to our blessings.

We render thanks for life itself  
For sight, hearing, smell and touch.

We give thanks for the beauty of nature and its gifts,  
And pray that we may share as richly as we have received.

We stand in wonder before the birth of children,  
The miracle of their growth, their love, and laughter.

We are grateful for love and the opening of hearts  
Between men and women, parents and children.

We give thanks for family, knowing that at times it can be frail,  
And recognize our obligation to nurture and protect it.

We are grateful for the blessings of caregivers,  
And know that our needs can be great, and difficult to achieve.

We give thanks to God who shares with us  
A small spark of glory and wisdom,

Involving us in the drama which is both God's and ours --  
The partnership of completing the work of creation.

# Family Caregivers Protestant Service

## Timeline Based on a mid November Service

### *Three months prior to Service*      *August 15 - September 15, XXXX*

- Commit to having service
- Identify project coordinator
- Have initial planning meeting
  - Select Service Date
  - Review Model Service
  - Identify Participants
  - Decide whether to have a reception
  - Assign follow-up activities
- Confirm Participants
  - Readers
  - Special Message
  - Music and Special Music

### *Two months prior to Service*      *September 15 - October 15, XXXX*

- Arrange for preparation of service bulletin
- Arrange for publicity

### *Month of Service*      *October 15 - November 15, XXXX*

- Finalize Service
  - Final planning committee meeting
  - Verify logistics for:
    - Music, Candle Lighting, Flowers, and Offering
  - Arrange for Service Support Personnel
    - Ushers and Candle Lighters

### *Week of Service*      *November 8 - 15, XXXX*

- Finalize Bulletin and Insert
- Reconfirm all Participants
- Schedule Pre Service Walk-through
- Confirm Materials
  - Candles, Offering Items, and Flowers

### *Date of Service*      *November 15, XXXX*

- Before Service
  - Conduct Walk-through
  - Confirm Preparations for Reception
- After Service
  - Attend Reception

### *Week After Service*      *November 16-22, XXXX*

- Thank participants
- Report results of your service to NFCA

## Detailed Planning Guide

## For a Protestant Family Caregiving Service

The following is a step by step guide to holding a service in support of family caregivers in your community. Planning a special service can take time particularly if there is no ongoing planning group to work with. However, the rewards of working together on a service of this nature make the effort expended worthwhile.

### Detailed Time Line

#### Three months prior to service:

Commit to having a family caregiver service

Identify a project coordinator

This may be either a lay person or a member of the clergy, but it is essential that the coordinator have access to contacts in the faith community. Attending to the needs of members of a congregation consumes considerable amounts of time so pastors often are reluctant to add another cause to their agenda or that of their faith community without a direct referral. If this is to be a multi congregational service, the project coordinator should plan to devote several hours a week to coordinating the planning process.

Hold the initial planning committee meeting

Select date for service

We suggest a date in November to honor caregivers during National Family Caregiving Month.

Review the model service and identify any adaptations needed for your community

The model service can be distributed to committee members in advance of the meeting and their suggestions for modifications can be discussed while the committee is together.

Decide whether a reception is appropriate given the timing and site of the service

Holding a reception following the service allows participants from all parts of the faith community to unite around the issue of support of family caregiving. It can provide time for the participants to meet each other and form connections that might become a network around the issue of family caregiving. Although holding a reception can add to the preparation and expense of the event, in many cases the benefits will outweigh the costs.

Make assignments for follow-up activities

Depending on the community and the resources available to the project coordinator, the committee members may simply serve as figureheads and be participants in the service or they may actively participate in promoting the service and the cause of family caregivers within the faith community.

Confirm participants

#### ***Readers***

In some cases the members of the planning committee will want to participate in the service. The project coordinator must encourage and facilitate as much committee involvement in the service as possible. Leading the readings for specific sections is a good way to involve them.

#### ***Special Message***

A family caregiver would be ideal. Pairing a caregiver and someone from their faith community who provides support in their caregiving efforts is another possibility. Another possibility for a special message is a local celebrity who has experience with family caregiving. There are more of them out there than you might expect. Following local media stories closely will yield additional sources of participants.

#### ***Music and Special Music***

Either vocal or instrumental music, independent of congregational singing, will add to the impact of the service and provide additional interest. The selection of the particular piece of music will be important. Lyrics that compliment the theme of the service can stay with participants long after the service is over. Consider including Children's Choir, Soloist, Ensemble, or Instrumental musicians to enhance the service

### Two months prior to the service:

Arrange for preparation of the service bulletin

The attached service format is available on floppy disk in Word Perfect 6.1 and Microsoft Word format. Use it as a template and insert the specifics of your service. One of the participating congregations may be able to support the service by preparing the bulletin.

Arrange for community wide announcements of the service

Announcements of the service through the publications or regular mailings can increase the participation in the service.

Many newspapers have sections that cover religious activities. Any coverage of the service that you can arrange will probably be printed after the event, so inserting an announcement of the service in the calendar of events will be important.

### One month prior to the service:

Finalize Service

Planning committee

Hold final meeting. This can be either a live or paper meeting depending on how your committee has agreed to work, but it is necessary to touch base at this point to follow-up on assignments and ensure that all participants are in agreement about the final form of the service.

Verify logistics for:

*Music*

Work with the music director to select prelude and other interval music. Be sure that they are prepared for any hymns you intend to include in the service and make them aware of the timing and type of any special music planned for the service.

*Candle Lighting*

Check on arrangements for candles if you are using the candle lighting portion of the service. Is there an existing Christ candle that can be used for the source of lighting or will you have to make arrangements for one? How will the light be passed among members of the congregation?

*Flowers*

If the congregation is providing flowers, finalize arrangements with them. If they are not assisting, a local florist may be willing to donate arrangements for the service in exchange for an acknowledgment in the service bulletin and in other materials about the service.

*Offering*

The offering in the model service is designed to give the participants a token for them to carry away from the service as a reminder about the concerns of family caregivers. Polished river stones signifying the bedrock of support given and needed by family caregivers are a possibility. Other possibilities for this type of offering are pins such as the "I Am Loved" pins, flowers, etc. Whatever the specifics of the offering, you will have to plan the logistics of carrying it out with a representative of the site.

Service support personnel

Ushers

You will need ushers to distribute bulletins and assist congregants in finding seats at the beginning of the service. The same people can assist in the offering portion of the service.

### Candle lighters

Depending on the size of the congregation and the logistics of the site, you may need 4 or 6 candle lighters for your service. The service is enhanced if it is possible to have candle lighters who are connected in some way to family caregiving.

### Week of the service:

#### Finalize Bulletin and Insert

Prepare an insert for the bulletin listing participants and one or two sentence biographies for each principal participant. Include all ushers, candle-lighter, and musicians in this insert.

This is also the appropriate place for acknowledgment of any organization or businesses such as a sponsoring congregation or club, printers, florists, caterers, etc. that have helped with the project.

Finalize contents of the bulletin and arrange for enough copies for the expected congregation.

#### Reconfirm all participants

Schedule a pre-service walk-through 45 minutes before service to bring all participants up to date on any site specific issues or last minute changes.

#### Materials

Verify that the appropriate number of individual candles are in hand

Verify that appropriate number of offering items are in hand

Confirm flower order and delivery time

### Day of service:

#### Prior to service

Conduct final briefing

Confirm that all preparations for the reception are complete

#### After service

Attend reception

### Week after the service:

Thank participants

Share your experience with NFCA; use the convenient enclosed form.