

Model Catholic 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 the bulletin for a model Catholic Caregiving Service. There are also some materials that can be used by your liturgy committee to help make the service specific for your parish.

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 original 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 Catholic 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.

Celebrating National Family Caregivers Month

A Catholic Service for celebrating National Family Caregivers Month (November, 1999) follows. Your parish certainly has a good number of the 25,000,000 caregivers in this country. Surely the caregivers in your parish would appreciate the recognition and prayerful support such a service would provide.

The Catholic Service can be used by itself, possibly closing with the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, since the Eucharist commits us to care for those in need by justice and charity.

An alternative could be the use of parts of the Catholic Service at a Daily or Sunday Mass, especially the Candle Lighting, the Gospel of Matthew (11:28-30), and the homily. Two basic themes are provided to guide the homilist.

A Catholic Service

Opening Hymn

I Heard the Voice of Jesus

Horatius Bonar

I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast.
I come to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad;
I found in him a resting place and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, Behold, I freely give the living water;
Thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live.
I come to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, I am this dark world's light;
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise, and all thy day be bright.
I looked to Jesus and I found in him my star, my sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk til traveling days are done.

Candle Lighting

Leader

Candles have always played an important part in the life of Christians. They still adorn our Churches and are placed by our alters to remind us of Christ who promised us, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. Caregivers can see then in Jesus a source of hope, an assurance of a life that

He will share with us to be our strength. We thank God for Christ, the Light of the World, as four of you come forth to light these candles.

Lighter 1

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.

Lighter 2

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.

Lighter 3

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.

Lighter 4

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.

Leader

We rejoice now in the light of these candles, strong reminders of the presence of Christ, the Divine Healer, in our lives as we live out the good days and the stressful days of caregiving.

Hymn

We Are Called

Come! Live in the light!
Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord
We are called to be light for the kingdom
To live in the freedom of the city of God.

Refrain:

We are called to act with justice
We are called to love tenderly,

We are called to serve one another
To walk humbly with God!

Sing! Sing a new song!
Sing of the great day when all will be one!
God will reign and we' ll walk with each other
As sisters and brothers united in love.

Refrain:

We are called to act with justice
We are called to love tenderly,
We are called to serve one another
To walk humbly with God!

Share the Caring

People

Christ said many times, *Love your neighbor as you love yourself.* We are to care for others as we care for ourselves. We must reach out in a special way to family caregivers who need our care and loving support. Our Catholic Bishops have reminded us, *We take pride in the fact that the Catholic community has always made special efforts to care for the elderly; but we also acknowledge with humility that there is much still to do. One thing that must still be done by the Church community is to gain an appreciation of the contribution of family caregivers and their need for community support. We all must share the caring!* We turn to God to ask His help to be caregivers as needed and to support caregivers as is always needed.

Reading from the Gospel of Matthew (11: 28-30)

Homily

Two basic themes:

1. ***Caregiving is critically needed:***
Families should see the story of loving reciprocity through life' s closing chapters. Where possible, the elderly should be welcomed into their own families... The community should provide for those who lack families and, in doing so, attend to all their needs, not just physical ones. (United States Catholic Bishops: To Live in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Reflection, n.54)
2. ***Caregivers need support!***
The responsibilities are very stressful; some are also rearing children; others are working full- or part-time to survive.

Families should rally around the principal caregiver(s) by providing financial support and by giving occasional breaks to the caregiver(s).

Parish community should provide moral support, but also practical assistance: forming support groups, arranging for respite care, helping with transportation, developing a parish health ministry...

Prayer

People

Loving God, 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, Jesus, calling me to come to you. I am tired and weary many times. Help me! Yet I pray with great confidence for you promised to give rest to the weary.

Heavenly Father, support me day by day through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I come with childlike faith and ask your help through Jesus Christ, your Son, who is Lord forever and ever. Amen

Hymn

God 's Blessing Sends Us Forth

St. Elizabeth

God' s blessing sends us forth, strengthened for our task on earth,
Refreshed in soul and renewed in mind.
May God with us remain, through us the Spirit reign.
That Christ be known to humankind.

God' s news in spoken word joyfully our hearts have heard;
O may the seed of God' s love now grow.
May we in fruitful deeds, gladly serve each other' s needs,
That faith in action we may show.

Suggestions for Parish Liturgy Committee

Work with the pastor to set aside one of the principal Masses in November to honor caregivers in the parish as a part of National Family Caregivers Month.

Use the parish bulletin for several weeks before the Mass to inform the parish of this special Mass for caregivers. Invite caregivers in the parish to come forward to take part in the Mass by a ministry or at least by their presence.

Possible ministries for family caregivers could be lectors, cantors, gift bearers, and Eucharistic ministers.

Encourage caregivers to write petitions for the Prayer of the Faithful (General Intercessions).

Ask the homilist at the Mass to highlight the themes of caregiving:

The need for caregivers in so many family situations and the need for support for those caregivers.

Ask the parish to pray regularly, hopefully each weekend, not only for those who are sick, but also for family caregivers.