



PRESBYTERIAN HEALTH NETWORK

A Network of the Presbyterian Health, Education & Welfare Association (PHEWA)

## Practical Ways You Can Help Family Caregivers

Reprinted/adapted from: *A Guide for Congregations and Parishes* by permission of the National Family Caregivers Association, Kensington, MD, the nation's leading organization for all family caregivers. 1-800-896-3650; [www.thefamilycaregiver.org](http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org)

- **Be a truly "Caring Congregation."** Survey the caregiving families in your community. Identify the help they need most - transportation, respite, help with insurance or other paperwork, household support, regular meals, guidance on end-of-life issues. Organize a volunteer network to respond to the needs most frequently cited.
- **Establish a family caregiver support network or buddy system.** Introduce caregivers in the congregation to one another. Provide them with the opportunity to support and learn from each other by giving them meeting space within the church or synagogue or by putting together a caregiver phone or email list. Provide a trained leader or a pastoral counselor for the group.
- **Sponsor a healthcare equipment loan program.** Home care equipment can be expensive. Some congregants/parishioners may have canes, wheelchairs, commodes, or other supplies or equipment they no longer need and will be happy to loan or donate to others. Publish a list of available equipment and who to contact in order to get it.
- **Honor your family caregivers** with an event that recognizes their contributions and provides them with the opportunity to have some fun, such as a special dinner or an outing, and be sure to include respite care as part of the event for those who need it.
- **Provide educational programs and/or materials on end-of-life planning.** Death and dying may be natural parts of life, but they are not issues most of us are comfortable talking about. You can help your congregants/parishioners and their families by helping them prepare for the end of life by: providing information on powers of attorney, living wills and other advance directives; developing a list of area professionals (elder care attorneys, geriatric care managers, financial planners) who can help families in time of need; encouraging families to create a living legacy with a scrapbook or video that captures the memories and stories of elders before it is too late.



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- **Compile a list of local resources** so that families in caregiving situations will know where to turn for help. The list can include government agencies, local home care agencies, medical equipment suppliers, hospices, assisted living communities, nearby senior centers and adult day care facilities, taxi services that have wheelchair accessible vehicles, pharmacies that deliver, and more.
- **Establish an intentional congregational health ministry (parish nurse program) to minister to the needs of your congregation.** As part of the program, recruit volunteers from the congregation to serve as support caregivers who are willing to provide respite for caregivers and a friendly visit to care recipients. Consider organizing all of the suggestions above under the auspices of the health ministry for a truly comprehensive program. To learn more about health ministry:

<http://www.phewacommunity.org/phnhealthnetwork.html>

<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/phewa/presbyterian-health-network/>

## Other Ministries to Support and Celebrate Caregivers

- Contact **Presbyterian Disaster Assistance** for preparation and training for your congregation.  
<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/pda/>
- Have each member of your congregation fill out an **Emergency Contact Information Form**. Keep one copy at the church where only designated people can retrieve it if needed—pastor, parish nurse, deacon/elder/head usher. Give copies to each member to keep with important papers at home and share with family. A sample form is included in this packet.

Get Connected! Learn what other congregations are doing by signing up for the **Presbyterian Health Network's Wellness Connection**, an on-line directory of congregations involved in health-related ministries. The directory helps identify congregations who are striving to live out, sustain, and promote health and wellness within the life of their congregations and communities.

<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/phewa/pcusa-congregational-health-related-ministry-direct/>



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- Provide **Home Visitation** on a regular basis for family caregivers and their loved one by trained congregational volunteers on regular basis. This helps to keep the family connected to the church and helps the pastor and parish nurse know what the needs of the family might be.
- Create a **RSVP Team, Respond Swiftly to Vulnerable Population Team**, to identify vulnerable members of your congregation and help them fill out **emergency contact information forms** for the church and their closest family members, along with a plan of action for their safety.
- Send a card of **appreciation** or a bouquet of flowers to brighten up a family caregiver's day.
- Help a family caregiver **decorate** their home for the holidays or offer to address envelopes for their holiday cards.
- Offer to **prepare Thanksgiving dinner** for a caregiving family in your congregation so they can just relax and enjoy the holiday.
- **Train family caregivers and others** in your congregation in first aid, fire extinguisher use, and infection control.
- **Invite family caregivers to participate in a prayer chain** for other caregivers in the congregation. This may help them feel more connected to the congregation as many caregivers are not able to attend services due to their responsibilities.

*“Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.”*

*John Greenleaf Whittier, 1807-1892*

*Thank you, Family Caregivers, for all you do!*