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INTRODUCTION

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*


The earliest stories of the Christian tradition reveal the central role of love within the Christian community of faith. Not only did Jesus claim that his commandment to love God and neighbor embodied the whole of the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:37-40), he further stated that love was actually a distinguishing mark of Christian discipleship. It could be said that the story of the Christian faith is a story of love: the love of God for humanity and humanity’s response to God’s love.

*Compassion*, frequently used synonymously with *love*, literally means *to feel or suffer with another*, or *to walk in another’s shoes*. Traditional Christian belief holds that God, in order to express love, chose to take human form. By God’s walking in human shoes, men, women, and children might more fully know, understand, and relate to the Holy One. Perhaps this love is best revealed in the name ascribed to Jesus Christ: Emmanuel, meaning *God with us*.

Today, the Christian community continues to concern itself with caregiving ministries. This ministry is an
opportunity for all Christians, not just those who have acquired a certain type of professional expertise. Caregiving is an opportunity to love others because God first loved us.

As you go forth to be a caregiver in the name of Jesus Christ, remember that the original disciples were sent into the world in a spirit of sincerity and simplicity. Christians need to offer a receptive heart and an openness to let God’s Spirit work through them.

Your attitude conveys your faith and hope. Acknowledge that God can actively work through you in any visit or relationship. Have a commitment to honor the life experience of those with whom you make contact. Provide the assurance of God’s presence, healing, and peace in the midst of any life situation.

**PREPARING FOR A VISIT**

In a caregiving visit, Christians offer respect for others by saying, through words and actions, “You are important to me. I put myself at your disposal. I want to understand and serve you.”

Bible study and prayer help caregivers prepare for making contact. Reading a psalm or the lectionary text for the day is a way to focus or center yourself for caregiving.
Allow yourself to be filled with a vision of caregiving that takes you beyond yourself. The best servants of Christ are not the most technically skilled, but those who are able to empty themselves, take the form of a servant, and become instruments of Christ’s peace. Bible study before ministry helps you take on this spiritual perspective.

You may wish to use a prayer like the following, adapted from that attributed to St. Francis of Assisi:

O Christ, grant that my mind may be likened unto your mind and my spirit in harmony with your own spirit. Make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me show love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is conflict, bring union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that I may seek not so much to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are forgiven; and it is in dying to sin that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

As you prepare for a visit or other contact, also remember some skills you have learned about caregiving.

1. Find out pertinent information about the person to be contacted from the pastor(s) or caregiving program coordinator(s).

2. Read the appropriate carecards.
3. Call and make an appointment for the visit, if appropriate.

4. Think about the person to be contacted. Consider the kinds of things that person may be thinking or feeling.

5. Listen acceptingly to the person.

6. Use open-ended questions.

7. Be aware of the feelings present.

8. Avoid the temptation to solve someone else’s problem.

9. Do not debate or invalidate the feelings of the person.

**SCRIPTURE**

Remember to:

1. Offer to read scripture during your pastoral visit and respect the response.

2. Use a Bible translation that is comfortable for you and meaningful to the person you are contacting.

3. Choose verses that meet the spiritual needs of the one whom you are contacting.

4. Bear in mind that the purpose of your contact is to offer a blessing to others. Share scripture that offers a healing and renewing possibility.

5. Consider offering a prayer after the scripture reading.
The following biblical texts and themes may be useful in your caregiving ministry:

**Psalm 23, The Divine Shepherd**

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.
Psalm 23, Addressing God

Holy One, you are my shepherd,
I shall not want;
you make me lie down in green pastures.
You lead me beside still waters;
you restore my soul.
You lead me in paths of righteousness
for your name’s sake.
Even though I walk through
the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil,
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy
shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in your house for ever.

—Book of Worship United Church of Christ
Assurance of God’s Protection

I lift up my eyes to the hills.  
From where does my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.

God will not let your foot be moved,  
the One who keeps you will not slumber.  
God who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
God will keep your life.  
The Lord will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and forevermore.

—Psalm 121, adapted
Thanksgiving for God’s Goodness

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God’s holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God’s benefits— who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

God does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is God’s steadfast love toward those who fear God; as far as the east is from the west, so far God removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear God. For God knows how we were made; God remembers that we are dust.
As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear God, and God’s righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep God’s covenant and remember to do God’s commandments.

—Psalm 103:1-5, 10-18, adapted
God Is Our Refuge

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

“Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

—Psalm 46:1-3, 10-11
Nothing Separates Us from God

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God’s purpose.

In all these things we are more than conquerors through the one who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 8:26-28, 37-39, adapted
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PRAYERS
The following prayers may be useful in your caregiving ministry.

The Lord’s Prayer
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses/our debts,
As we forgive those who trespass
against us/our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.
For Healing

Healing God,
we know that you care about the well-being
  of every creature.
We trust that your desire is for health
in body and in mind.
Give to your servant, name, the gift of abundant life.
In your mercy, offer to her/him the gift of health.
In all things, we trust you to work for good;
through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.
For Rest

O God, come to us
when we are weary with restlessness.
Help us to be still.
Make us at peace in heart and mind
and heal our muscles of their tension.
Fill us with the well-being
that comes with the knowledge
that as we rest in bed,
we are resting in you and are being supported
by your desire for health.
In your peace,
we would live all the days of life.
In your house,
we would surrender to a sweet sleep
as a guest rests after a weary journey.
Refresh us with rest, O God,
and renew a right spirit within us. Amen.
For Relief from Pain

Eternal God, your days are without end and you practice compassion with every creature who is weary and heavy-laden. We cast our pain upon you and pray that you will be with us to make our burden lighter. Your servant, *name*, suffers from pain this day, O loving God, give him/her sweet release. Give *name* strength to endure by making her/his mind rest in you. In this time of struggle, give us a sign that you are near and that your peace will overcome the suffering of the moment. You are the water of life; whoever drinks of you shall not thirst. Grant that we may drink deeply of your peace this day and rest in the coolness of your presence. In the name of Christ. Amen.
For One Who Is Seriously Ill

God, our Eternal Savior,
you have promised your holy presence
with us through every time of life.
Bless with your saving grace
this precious servant.
Grant, O God, the serenity
that comes from knowing
that nothing in life or death,
in the world or in eternity,
can separate name from your love
and the power of the resurrection
in Christ Jesus; in whose name we pray.
Amen.
For One Who Is Depressed

Christ, who brings new life into the midst of death,
turn our mourning into dancing.
In our lives it is so easy to become
discouraged and depressed.
There are times when we believe
life will never be joyful again.
There are times when we feel defeated
by the pains and betrayals of life.
Today, we pray for name.
Do for her/him what she/he cannot at the present moment do for herself/bimself.
Give him/her the courage and patience to wait for your liberating action,
knowing that every minute will bring new strength and that new possibilities will come in their season.
Help name to know that he/she is not alone in his/her struggle.
Fill her/his mind with memories of friends who care for her/bim and
and her/his heart with a knowledge that you are with her/bim and surround her/bim with love and acceptance.
Give now the peace that passes all understanding and the courage not to give up;
through Jesus Christ, who endured the cross, we pray. Amen.
For Those Who Wish to Confess

Gracious God, our sins are too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and too deep to undo. Forgive what our lips tremble to name, what our hearts can no longer bear, and what has become for us a consuming fire of judgment. Set us free from a past that we cannot change; open to us a future in which we can be changed; and grant us grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

—Book of Worship United Church of Christ
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