Historically, the faith community has provided invaluable assistance to individuals and their caregivers, offering guidance and assistance in maintaining a sense of well-being in their time of need. The purpose of this material is to reach out to the faith community interested in helping caregivers and their loved ones.

Typically, caregivers take care of their family member with no outside help, creating much stress. Respite care is an effective support for the caregiving challenges. Respite care can be provided in a group setting, in-home respite, or other means of support. There is help available for faith leaders who want to develop a ministry for family caregivers. The faith community really can play an essential role in helping caregivers and remind the caregiver that God has not forgotten them.

What is Respite?

The Lifespan Respite Care Act of 2006 defines respite care as “planned or emergency care provided to a child or adult with a special need in order to provide temporary relief to the family caregiver of that child or adult.” Respite benefits 2 persons. It provides safe companionship to someone who should not be left alone while a family caregiver gets a break from the routine of caring for that loved one. It can occur in the home with a friend or an aide or in a group setting.

Approximately one quarter of North Carolinians report giving regular care to a spouse, parent, child or grandchild on top of balancing their own responsibilities.

Family caregivers provide at least 80% of all care services needed to help their loved one live at home and remain out of an institution. Of those family caregivers, more than 80% report high levels of stress. They are at a higher risk than the general population for chronic disability, depression and morbidity. Thus, their care recipient is at higher risk for placement in a long term care facility.
So how can the community come alongside family caregivers? Provide respite!

Caregivers report respite is one of their top unmet needs. It allows a family member “time off” for a restorative break. To get the full therapeutic benefit of respite, that “time off” should focus on the activities chosen by that individual caregiver which refreshes or replenishes them. Respite might free them to walk around the park, join a bowling team, attend worship, sing in the choir, read to their grandchild, go to their own doctor or complete errands less rushed.

No act of caring is too small.

Why a Respite Care Ministry?

Respite programs can be a catalyst for true inclusion in every faith community. The benefits of providing a respite care ministry are numerous, not only for the family, but for the members as well. Some of the benefits include:

✓ increased family participation in worship services and other activities;
✓ better awareness by members of family needs;
✓ greater sense of belonging by families;
✓ better awareness by members of barriers to participation of individuals with disabilities;
✓ development of new skills for both the caregiver and respite care ministry volunteers;
✓ creates a positive image in the community.

Many faith communities are already serving their caregivers, although it may not be identified as “respite care ministry”. Examples include:

✓ providing transportation (to worship service, doctor’s appointments etc.);
✓ sponsoring Meals on Wheels so working caregivers don’t have to rush home on their lunch hour to provide a meal;
✓ visiting with those in need to allow the caregiver a break;
✓ giving care recipient companionship and stimulation;
✓ providing meals to a family; or
✓ offering cleaning or handyman services.

“Connect, Engage, Expand, and Enhance”

Suggestions for creating a caregiver-friendly faith community

Provided on the next page is a list of possible ideas. These can be adopted for the large organizations of over 1000 to the smallest of 20 or less. These supports/services can be ongoing or for a designated amount of time. Groups to consider for facilitating these suggestions could be women, men, youth, etc.
**In Reach:** (Activities that can be conducted within the organization)

1. **Education:**
   a. Training, conferences, workshops, informational and educational classes
   b. Library w/information on issues and topics that may affect caregivers
   c. Identify faith members with expertise who can support the needs of caregivers (lawyers, Medical providers, social workers, etc.)

2. **Monetary Assistance:**
   a. Help pay bills
   b. Help w/medication cost
   c. Voucher for respite

3. **Special programs:**
   a. Memory café (places designated for persons with Alzheimer's or related disease to go with their caregiver to socialize)
   b. Host support group
   c. Host onsite respite
   d. Care for the caregiver, strategies to help people take care of themselves
   e. Develop plan of action; care in case caregiver is not available
   f. Volunteer to assist with care recipient allowing caregiver to attend worship activities
   g. Caregiver day out.

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**Outreach:** (Activities that can be conducted within the community)

1. **Transportation**
   a. To worship activities
   b. Grocery Store
   c. Doctors Appt.

2. **Community Programs**
   a. Collaborating with other local organizations, agencies or programs
      ✓ Visit/sponsor local long term care facility
      ✓ Meals on wheels

3. **Home support**
   a. Mowing lawn
   b. Take out trash
   c. Light home cleaning
   d. Home repairs
   e. Taking a meal
   f. Make faith studies and spiritual traditions available to the homebound
   g. Companionship/visiting – giving caregiver a break or providing socialization
   h. Picking up meds or groceries

4. **Other**
   a. Allow use of building without cost
      ✓ To conduct/sponsor educational events, support groups, memory café
   b. Adopt a family
      ✓ Individual/group/family opportunity to support family in need
         o Financial
         o Home Support
   c. Medical support
      ✓ Medical equipment lending closet (where donations can be made as well)

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One family caregiver writes:

"If I had known my church had this service, I would have asked for help."
This document is the result of discussions held at the 2015 North Carolina Lifespan Respite Planning Summit and is in part based upon The ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center Fact Sheet: Respite and the Faith Community. To see the complete article go to http://archrespite.org/docs/Faith-Based_Fact_Sheet_5-27-10.pdf

Additional Resources

The North Carolina Respite Care Coalition is a grassroots network of parents, family caregivers and professionals in the field of respite care as well as government funding representatives and others from across the state who have an investment in family support services. For more information, see: http://northcarolinarespitecarecoalition.org


North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) is a dynamic ministry serving older adults across the state with a mission to enable the aging to maintain independence and enjoy quality lives. One of the many services of the organization is NCBAM Care Teams, which are coordinated, trained ministry groups of two to four members who share responsibility in providing assistance and support to an aging individual and the caregiver. NCBAM works with churches to organize and trains to Team members. www.ncbam.org or phone 1.877.506.2226.

We wish you the very best in your chosen ministry to provide respite and support for those in need, and we thank you for your efforts in reaching out to family caregivers and their loved ones.

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