Caring for Parents, Children and Others

Many people find themselves, at some point in their life, as primary caretakers for another person, be it a child, a parent or someone else. Even when the tasks of caring for another human being are shared with others, that role can still becoming a consuming reality. As faithful people, of course, we know there are spiritual dimensions to the care we provide. But there are also limits to that care. And, of course, even those of us who care for others, need to be cared for as well. Today’s session invites your reflection on how we can care for others in generous, productive, sustainable ways, and let others do the same for us.

**Caregiving Grace**

**an excerpt from an article by Emily Wierenga**

As I stack dirty dishes and pile papers on the table, I notice Mom's tiny, blue handwriting scrawled across a sticky note, reminding herself of an upcoming MRI. I wipe away a tear and glance over at her. Her head is bowed as though praying as she sits in her blue chair, which is surrounded by plants and overlooks the pond. She has grade 2 astrocytoma, a brain tumor. The doctors don't know how long she has, and so I water her plants, change her diapers, cook her supper, and kiss her goodnight.

My son sits in his Bumbo watching me and watching his grandmother's head bob to the music on the stereo. Soon I'll hook her arms around my neck and we'll dance our way to the bathroom, her in her stretchy blue pants and me in my black leggings. My son will gurgle and I'll beg God for the strength to keep caring for those I love.

A woman's love is endless, but her energy is not. It's easy to want to care for others, while forgetting that we, ourselves, have needs. A recent poll by AARP revealed that approximately 34 million Americans serve as unpaid caregivers. Four to five million care for parents with long-term health problems. "Caregivers report having one or more chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, at nearly twice the rate of all Americans," Mindy Fetterman of USA Today writes in "[Becoming 'Parent of Your Parent' an Emotionally Wrenching Process](http://www.usatoday.com/money/perfi/eldercare/2007-06-24-elder-care-cover_N.htm)." "Of those who say their health has worsened because of caregiving, 91 percent report depression."

Burnout is extremely common among familial caregivers—the majority of whom are women, according to the National Alliance for Caregiving—because of the guilt that accompanies the role. That is true in my case. Mom and I suffered a strained relationship while I was growing up. As a result, I spent hours trying to make up for those years—trying to fold enough laundry or water enough plants or bake enough cookies to compensate for the way I'd hurt her—but this only led to exhaustion.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. In which of your relationships right now do you provide the most caregiving? What are the most difficult burdens associated with that care-taking? What are the greatest blessings?
2. How do you allow yourself to be cared for, even if that kind of care looks very different than the care that you’re providing to your family member?
3. Later in this article, the author writes, “In the same way that it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to support an invalid.” How connected to do feel to your “village” in caring for your child/parent or relative?
4. Do you find it easier to provide care or receive care?

**A Prayer**

*O great Life Giver, you fill my days with blessings and opportunities, and you offer me myself in every moment and experience. I often turn to look elsewhere for the way of holiness. Let me see that the people I care for are my teachers, that every experience I have is my teacher, and that my life offers lessons tailor-made for me. Help me see the blessings. Amen.*