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# Conference Care

## Facilities Newsletter

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*“And went to him, and bound up his wounds...and took care of him”* Luke 10:34  
*“But that the members should have the same care one for another”* 1 Corinthians 12:25

### Editorial

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

The accounts we read in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John of Jesus’ life while here on earth clearly speak of His compassion toward mankind. It didn’t matter to Jesus whether the person or people He met were rich or poor, educated or ignorant, old or young, He did what He could to alleviate suffering, feed the hungry, heal the sick, bless the children, comfort, and lift. The scriptures clearly teach us to follow Jesus’ example. After the account of the good Samaritan, Jesus said, “Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37).

Even today, Jesus’ compassion touches our hearts. We appreciate His compassion. We are sinners, deserving to die, and yet Jesus reaches out with compassion and touches our lives, cleanses us from sin, and sets us on a new way to eternal life. This compassion is beyond human comprehension.

In John 13:15 we read, “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” Jesus said this to His disciples when He was giving them the instructions to wash one another’s feet, but I believe this can be applied also in a broader sense. Indeed, washing another’s feet is already an act of humility and compassion. May we apply this teaching to every area of our lives, to our elders, to our children, to the people we meet on the street.

“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8).

When Abram and Lot’s herdsmen strove about grass for their herds, Abram made an effort to make peace,

saying, “For we be brethren” (Genesis 13:8). The above verse in 1 Peter instructs us to love as brethren and be courteous one to another. This would include taking care of those that need care.

“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him” (1 John 3:17)? We are in a position that we must say we have this world’s good, and we see need all around us. This scripture then speaks to us of our responsibility to open up our bowels of compassion to our fellowman. Otherwise, how can the love of God be dwelling in us?

God will bless each heart, each congregation, each worker who opens up his heart of compassion to another. And what a blessing it brings!

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### Quality of Life

My thoughts have been drawn to the subject lately of the quality of life. This article provides an opportunity to explore this concept more deeply, and hopefully will share some insight on care giving with the reader. The foremost thing that I have learned regarding quality of life is that it is a totally individual and personal experience that cannot be dictated by others including the health care worker.

In reflecting on this subject for myself, I have to contemplate and examine the myriad of experiences that have influenced my own personal view on quality of life. Many of my experiences have been influenced by a secular education and the humanistic view of the medical field around me. As a Christian working in this world, the Holy Spirit has been faithful to teach and to guide throughout this whole process.

Quality of life is often referenced in discussions surrounding end of life care. The way the medical field throws options and questions at people suggests that we

really have a say in the matter and can dictate our end to our Maker. I have to admit that without realizing it, I have sometimes been influenced by this mentality. Suddenly I find myself looking at some of the suffering around me and thinking, what can I do to avoid this? I sometimes get the vain thought that with my medical knowledge, I can make just the right choices so that when sufficient recovery is no longer possible I can choose the appropriate comfort care and skip out on the suffering associated with death.

Is this proper thinking? Sickness, suffering, and death are a part of life brought about initially by the fall of man and sin. Job went through extreme sickness and suffering, yet concluded that God was just. I have often been encouraged by the following saying, "If God brought you to it, He will bring you through it."

As a nurse, I have been an observer and an active participant in the many sufferings that both disease and the restoration of health can bring. Through this suffering, I have observed both bitterness and cheerful acceptance or resignation. The latter is much more desirable and brings the greater quality of life. This quality comes from knowing and trusting the Giver of Life. Do we have a drive to cling to life? Or can we recognize when God is calling us to our long home?

Our society has elevated and glorified independence and productivity to the point that old age is a villain to be fought rather than accepted as God's plan. Can we truly "rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man" (Leviticus 19:32) if we are caught up in this thinking? Are we ignorant of the valuable exchange that takes place between our elders and their families and communities? We are dependent on our elders to make peace, to share wisdom, and to lead us to the "ancient landmarks" of our faith. Do we recognize this value and influence on our lives? Let us recognize it now and show appreciation and support to our elders while they are with us.

Our church care facilities strive to provide for the special needs that our elders require from us. The unique difficulties that face our elders are loneliness, helplessness, and boredom. What can we do to help them through these difficulties and thus improve or maintain their quality of life?

In order to combat these difficulties our staff needs to have both the time and the compassion to provide companionship outside of personal care, and they need to be able to assist our elders in giving care to others. It is amazing to see how our elders thrive when they are given tasks to carry out within the facility. Some of these tasks at Grace Home include maintaining outdoor lighting, gardening, folding laundry, and offering prayer before meals. More impressive are the many spontaneous acts of care giving that I see among residents. These include comforting each other, inquiring about a sick or dying roommate, consoling family members, and calling staff

when someone needs help. These acts are encouraged because they help fulfill some of the deepest needs of our elders.

Our church communities can help in providing quality of life by providing the antidote for boredom: variety and spontaneity. This antidote is more effective from the community because it does not flow from the daily routine of the facility. Visits from children are the most spontaneous of all.

May we always remember that while we often cannot change the effects of disease and suffering, we can always provide those simple expressions of Christ's love to those around us and thus improve their quality of life. It is the many small human interactions throughout every day that bring quality of life and meaning to our elders.

Nathaniel Groff, Grace Home, Livingston, California

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## Pictures from the Office

What makes the administration of our facilities rewarding? It's what is seen through the open office door. Administration offices with open door policies and strategically located desks bring on the rewards. [Editor's note: an open office door policy also encourages communication with employees, which in itself brings on the rewards.] Experiences dealing with residents, and families of residents, are also rewarding. These may occasionally happen behind closed doors as well, or may simply be in the daily round of duties.

The other day the sweet strains of an old German song came wafting into the office. Onlookers saw a care-giver, with a 102 year-old lady's head on her shoulder, singing uninhibitedly, with the resident making efforts to sing along. What makes a scene like this even lovelier to observers and listeners is knowledge of both the resident and the care-giver.

There are residents with fears. What can be done to help conquer those fears? One morning a nurse aide walked into the office, laughing joyfully. "We did it!" she said of a resident. A few days later another aide walked past the nurses' centre, arm in arm with the same resident. The care-giver had a huge smile on her face. Again, "We did it!"

Other incidents that make this work rewarding include birthday parties set up by fellow employees. They can really stir the emotions. Next time it's nursing staff pitching in, going beyond their line of duty, or kitchen staff, jolly and friendly, spreading cheer and goodwill. Sometimes it's the housekeepers, organizing an informal sing along with residents, fellow employees, and visitors. Then we may see the nurse aides working at getting a resident mobile again after months in the hospital. Will she walk again? They may not commit themselves but you can feel them rising to the challenge. Residents are seen encouraging each other. There are times taken out for

talks about eternity that make spirits mellow. All these things are blessings. Wonderful!

And then there are things that are difficult to explain, such as workers maturing and getting involved in the care plans, observations shared that administration has no way of noticing because they just can't be everywhere. With quality care-givers, administration gets to the place where they feel that just about anything can be accomplished. Yes, sometimes there is a setback, but with the next day comes courage and determination with a joyful countenance.

Maybe the picture can be completed like this: Anna, Anja, Jewel; Sharla, Sheila, Sharon; Katharina, Veronika, Valentina; Maria, Coralee, Faith; Arletha, Olga, Eva and Elvira; Rachel, Sheryl, Christine; Lois, Doris, Heather; Marlene and Lotti; Connie, Karen and Liz; Claudette, Nica and Audrey; Lorene, Elwira and Sid. And there are more, and a host of people supporting and praying.

That's what makes administration rewarding.

Tim Penner, Maplewood Manor, Steinbach, Manitoba

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Found in the bedside locker of an old lady after she died:

What do you see, Nurse, what do you see?  
What do you think when you're looking at me?

A crabby old woman, not very wise,  
Uncertain of habit, with far-away eyes;

Who dribbles her food, and makes no reply  
When you say in a raised voice, "I do wish you'd try."

Who seems not to notice the things that you do,  
And forever is losing a stocking or shoe;

Who, resisting or not, lets you do as you will  
With bathing and feeding the long day to fill.

Is that what you're thinking, is that what you see?  
Then open your eyes, Nurse, you're looking at ME.

I'll tell you about me as I sit here so still,  
As I do all your bidding, and I eat at your will.

I'm a small child of ten with a father and mother,  
Brothers and sisters who love one another;

A young girl of sixteen with wings on her feet,  
With stars in her eyes and a blush on her cheek;

A bride now at twenty (my heart gives a leap),  
Remembering the vows that I promised to keep.

At twenty-five now I have young of my own  
Who need me to build a secure, happy home.

A woman of thirty, my young have grown fast,  
Bound to each other with ties that should last.

At forty, our sons, now grown, will be gone,  
But my man is beside me to see I don't mourn.

At fifty, once more little ones 'round my knee,  
Again we knew children, my loved one and me.

Alas! Dark days are upon me, my husband is dead,  
I look to the future, I shudder with dread,

For my young are all busy rearing young of their own,  
And I think of the years and the love that we've known.

I'm an old woman now and nature is cruel,  
The unbidden changes make age look like a fool.

The body in crumbles, grace and vigour depart,  
There now is a stone where I once had a heart.

But inside this old carcass a young girl still dwells,  
And now and again my battered heart swells,

I remember the joys, I remember the pain,  
And I'm loving and living life over again.

And I think of the good years gone away fast,  
And accept the stark fact that nothing will last.

So open your eyes, Nurse, open and see  
Not a crabby old woman, look closer, it's ME!

Author unknown

Submitted by Mrs. Arvid Ensz, Madrid, Nebraska

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## Gathering the Gleanings

Many years ago, long before modern sophistication began its rise to the current station it now occupies, life was much simpler. While indeed it was far less complicated, it was not easier. Many of the world's architectural wonders of past days bear attention to detail and intricacy that is awe-inspiring. The fact that most, if not all of these achievements were done simply with brawn and brain puts current day technology in a rather shallow light. And, when we consider the way that modern humanity goes about attaining their ends in a less than genuine way, we do well to pause and inspect some of those old, enduring landmarks and to question sincerely what has contributed to their lasting quality.

The example of reaping is often given in the Bible. Given the information gathered from the Bible and various history books, one can presume that most of the reaping during that time was done by hand. This was accomplished with a handheld scythe, borne in the hands of the reaper. When the crop was mature, the reaper would step into the field, and using long swinging strokes of the scythe, cut the crop off horizontally. Behind the reaper came a crew of servants with short ropes tucked into their belts. Gathering up armfuls of the crop, they used these short ropes to tie around the bundles and then they stacked several of these bundles (called shocks of grain) together to form a defensive structure against the elements. Insofar as the owner of the field was concerned, the reaping process was now complete.

However, as we read in the case of Ruth, there was another group that had been standing on the edge of the field, awaiting their turn at what is called the gleanings. As has been stated, according to the owner, the reaping process was complete. In keeping with God's law and order, what was left in the field, that which had fallen from the grain-heavy heads and had fallen to the ground was

now made available to the poor of the land. These were the folk who were willing, because of their humble station in life, to sort among the straws, picking up the choice bits leftovers.

Perhaps today's technological generation, and the jet-set generation of previous years, tend to look upon our aged people today with a certain detachment. After all, haven't they lived a full life? Aren't they in the best homes money can buy? In a way, we could say they have been shocked up and are standing at attention for the final reaping day. And truly, their fruit bearing years are past. What has been done is done. And yet...is it really done? What of the gleanings? Who has been diligent, yea, humble enough to search out those choice bits of grain that the reaping process of life has left in its wake?

The instant age we live in today has given us to understand that if we aren't in a constant networking mode, something is wrong. The digital realm offers a loaded agenda of pastimes to immerse oneself in, all of which gives a sense of purpose but which leaves one questioning what the real intent was once the immediate conundrum was solved. Flashing lights, imitation sunrises and sunsets on screens, and voluminous data all have a way of becoming normal after awhile. In fact, it becomes compelling. We have grown accustomed to that niggling voice of technology that always pushes for action.

It takes time and patience to find the gleanings. Surely the backs of the gleaners ached and the weariness of the mid day sun took its toll on many. Perhaps, on some days, they came away with very little for their efforts. But ah, what a rich reward on the day when a patch of heavy gleanings was found! It surely made the long wearisome days sing with joy! Just the memory was enough to spur them onward for more.

Today, we may be tempted to complain at the results of our gleanings gathered from the aged. Why so? Could it be that we have not humbled ourselves to stoop low enough to hear the heartbeat of our beloved one? Have we gone to the effort of researching the time of life during their fruit bearing years in order to offer bits of information to stimulate their memory? Do we settle for a ten minute session out of our busy day that appeases our conscience but hardly primes the pump for them? Surely those ten minutes given are worth something, but if they are given out of duty, it can be felt. If we come away from our loved ones side with dismay, surely the error is on our part.

A rich harvest of gleanings awaits us today. Forays into the aged ones lives can prove extremely rewarding and beneficial. As was mentioned at the beginning, many of the major edifices of today were designed and constructed by the generation now in homes for the elderly. When one delves into that part of their lives and looks deeply through the changing scenes of the years hence, it gives one pause. What can be found is not something that wants losing.

Let us, who are of today, hold those withered hands, and caress those bent shoulders a little longer, in such a way that the gleanings can be brought forth to the culmination of a full harvest so that nothing be wasted.

“Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:32).

Les Dirks, Montezuma, Kansas

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## Our Vision

What is our vision of our homes for the elderly? What and where is our responsibility? Our conference has been in the work of caring for our aging ones for around sixty-five years. If I am not mistaken, our first facilities were built just after World War II ended. Our first records of our forefathers having homes for the aged and caring for their own would reach back about four hundred years. It seems that our initial vision has been to care for our own. After becoming more affluent and accumulating some wealth and material goods, it seems we have a tendency to look to our government and to government programs to help us. This is not all wrong, however, when we then turn to the government for help to protect our assets, this would become a question.

We have a number of congregations that are looking at or planning their own rest homes. Are we as a church ready for the challenge that is being placed before us? I believe we have the resources, but are our resources and our commitment to care for our aging population properly balanced? Have we as the church prepared our young people and have we planted the conviction in the hearts of each one, especially our younger ones, that it is our God-given responsibility to care for our elders? So often it seems there is a certain stigma attached to working in a rest home. I believe God will reward everyone who will give this work every consideration. I believe that God will supply everything needed so this work can move forward. We must be careful that we do not move ahead of God in this work, or stay behind when He moves. May God bless each one involved, as it can sometimes become tedious. We shall reap in due season. May this work become a blessing to the church at large and to the communities involved.

William Giesbrecht

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*Conference Care Facilities Newsletter* is published quarterly by the Conference Care Facilities Committee to share concerns, inspirations, and ideas among the care facilities of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. Articles and suggestions should be sent to Roland Toews, editor, at Box 295, Linden, Alberta, Canada T0M 1J0. Phone/fax: 403-443-2215.

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