
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*

A Parallel

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
“Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel.

“And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain:

“And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many;

“And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds;

“So they went up, and searched the land.

“And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.

“And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.

“And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.

“Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great; and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.

“And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

“But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.

“If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey” (Numbers 13:1, 2, 17-19, 21, 25-28, 30, 31; 14:8).

And God’s people that lived in the United States increased, and they worked hard, and they built goodly houses to live in. And they bought nice vehicles to travel in, and they ate of the abundant food that was in the land.

And the people that lived in the southeast district were gathered together, and they said, “Let us make a place for our grandpas and grandmas, a place for them to move into when they get old and tired and when the cares of life become more than they can cope with, a place where they will get loving care from their own people.

So they chose out from among them some valiant men, men of integrity, men they could trust, and said to them, “Go, spy out other care facilities, learn what needs to be built for our grandpas and grandmas, something that will meet the specifications of the government, and what it will cost.”

So the chosen men went forth and spent many days in committee meetings. They visited many care facilities scattered throughout the land. They drew up some plans and they counted the cost.

After many days they returned and gathered the people together. They said, “It is a big project, and the cost will be over three million dollars.”

Then the people’s hearts grew faint, and they doubted. And they said, “We cannot do it, because the cost is too great for us. We may have to deny ourselves of the good and many eating places, and

shopping malls of our nice cities. We have worked hard and deserve these things. And we must have a vacation to get away from the stress of our busy lives. And besides, we already have a little place for them; it is good enough.”

But the committee said, “Nay, but we are well able to build it. Only trust the Lord and give willingly of your money. The work is of the Lord.”

Paul Unruh, Oakwood Manor Board Member

The Balanced Board

The responsibility of a board member in one of our facilities is diversified to say the least. The unsuspecting brother goes to a council meeting one night and then goes home a board member of the local care facility. Somewhere, sometime later it begins to sink into his heart that the work is great and at times very perplexing. Hopefully, by then he has committed himself to the Lord in this great work, and asked for His leading. But the questions still remain in our minds as to how to be of the best service to the board and to the care facility that we can be. There perhaps is not any one simple article or speech that can be given to provide all the answers. In my meditation on this subject a certain thought settled and lingered in my heart and I will share it and trust that God can multiply it as He knows best.

I was recently impressed with the Divine order of “three,” the triune God, the three that agree in the earth, and the three-fold chord, to name a few examples. The board of directors of a facility is the governing body, and being a board member is being in a leadership position, so we should apply Biblical truths and principles to all our ways. Following the order of “three” mentioned above, we might say that we could divide board responsibility into three categories: Reality, Vision, and The Plan.

Reality is the focus on the everyday challenges, the issues at hand, budget keeping, morale building, maintenance, etc. We, as board members, need to be involved in educating ourselves with the regulatory aspect of our facilities, and visiting them as much as we can to understand the current needs of the day. This alone can be overwhelming at times. But we must remember that this is only one of the three aspects, and our duties are perhaps only just beginning.

Vision, without it we perish. As board members, we need to have a part of our focus on the future of our facilities. Sometimes it is necessary to expand to stay financially solvent or competitive. Specific needs change from time to time. What about the “baby boomers” that will start needing care in ten to twenty years from now? If your first thought is that that is too far in the future, you might do well to consider your vision. What about aging facilities? As time progresses, so do our expectations. We may argue that if things were good fifty or seventy-five years ago, they

are good enough today. Where else can you possibly apply this thinking and get by with it? Then there is the matter of the current economy. We cannot afford to let our fears and current reality hinder our vision. To do so is to succumb and perish. We need to give ourselves to prayer and meditation the Lord’s will and direction. Current hardships to determine should not steal our vision. It may alter, delay, or speed it up, but defeat is not a part of God’s ability. Reality is that there are giants in the land. Vision says they can be overcome. There is a cause. Our care facilities are a mission, a humanitarian service to others, and places where we can feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoners of a frail body, and give drink to the thirsty. There is as much or more gospel work to be done in a care facility as in any foreign mission we have. We should look at them on an equal basis. We need to strengthen our vision of this great work.

Then we must plan. If we do not have a plan to get where we envision going, we will not get there. This is a simple truth. However, it is easy to go on day after day just reacting to every situation as it comes. If we are proactive in our approach and have a plan to go by, we can sometimes avoid, or at least lessen, the difficulty or the issue. If we have the vision to do something major, planning how to get there is imperative to give us the faith that we can reach our goals. God enjoys blessing our endeavors, but can we expect that He will bless our inactivity? Faith is increased by how God has led us in our past experiences and is strengthened by the evidence and hope that is manifested in our plan for the future.

When these three, reality, vision, and plan, work together in harmony, I am convinced that God will bless and prosper our efforts and we can properly love and care for the aged and needy and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). Let us not be weary in well doing (v. 9). Sometimes it hurts the pocket book and we tend to resist the work, but if we wait until we are the resident to have clear vision, it will be too late. I would like to encourage everyone to re-evaluate our vision, our support, our attitude, and our willingness to share our resources with our care facilities. May God bless us according to our faith in His work.

Lester Giesbrecht, Grace Home board member

Working With Alzheimer’s Residents

[Editor’s note: for protection of privacy, names in the following article have been changed.]

Let me tell you about Mildred. She was a tiny little thing with a big personality. Her husband and boys were loggers in the little town nearby. When she came to us she was in the wandering stage of Alzheimer’s disease. One of the first things Johnny had to do was to build a fence around the yard to keep her in. It had to be high enough so that she could not climb over. If someone left the gate open, she was gone. In her own words, “I’m a good walker.” She was, as

we found out to our dismay when we drove down the main road to pick her up. The good part was that she was always ready to get into the car after a half mile jaunt down the highway, but the bad part was the peril of being struck by a passing car. If that would happen, how would we explain it to the family who trusted us to keep her safe, not to mention our own grief if she should be injured or die. This meant we must lock the gate even more securely.

In the morning Mildred was cheery, talkative, and helpful. She washed many dishes for me, feeling so good about herself for a job well done. I always stayed nearby and helped keep things on course and visited with her. Those were the good times. Lunch time was good too, with her helping set the table and eating a satisfying meal of chicken, potatoes, and gravy with the trimmings. She would then lean back and declare that she was now “pouchy, acky, sacky,” and must really stop eating. The other residents laughed along with her and us.

That takes us to about three in the afternoon. A subtle change would begin to take place. “I want to go home,” she would say. We would ask why? She would say, “The children are coming home from school and I need to fix them a snack.” “It’s a long way,” we would say. “I’ll walk. I’m a good walker,” she would assert quite definitely. Now what to do? Sometimes it would work to say, “Come sit here with me and we’ll sing some songs.” She loved to sing and used to sing in her church choir, but sometimes she was too restless for that. I would offer her a magazine and look at it with her, but she would only want to go home. We would just have to ride this one out. Then she would go outside and stand at the gate. I would keep a wary eye on her, lest she would figure out the lock. That is one thing these people are good at doing. Finally she would come back in, looking quite unhappy, and go to her room. After choosing some items that she would need to go home, shoes, nightgown, hairbrush, and an extra sweater, she would go stand at the gate again. At this point there was nothing we could do to change her mind. I would go out and talk to her a little and find out that she was expecting a ride. I would give her a hug and tell her I hope it would come soon. The evening light was waning and she would get a little disgusted with no ride in sight, so she would pitch all her items over the gate and come back into the house.

She would be tired and more relaxed now, so I would offer her a cup of tea, which she would accept. Soon it would be time for bed and that familiar ritual would begin. She would maybe ask about the children, but if I would tell her that the parents are home now and they will take care of them, she would accept it. I would tuck her in after giving her a nice lotion-rub on her legs and feet (one does have tired feet after standing so long at the gate) and she would settle in for the night. She would thank me for such a nice day and say goodnight sweetly and we had made another day.

The days would vary, but the pattern of afternoon disturbances remained. As she became older the intense

desire to go home or out walking faded. By that time I was pretty good at walking myself, as Johnny would sit with the other grandmas and talk with them while I took a walk with Mildred.

Later, after she went home to stay with her son and his wife, we kept her for a month or two at a time to give them some respite. They would go traveling and come back ready to take her back home. Finally there came a time when we had her in our home and it was evident that she was failing physically. The last two years we took care of her in our home several times a year. Her son and his wife just needed the break from the constant care.

Mildred was now in a wheel chair and needed to be fed. I blended her food, and hot cereal for breakfast was a must. Her medicine needed to be pulverized and given in applesauce. She still had times when she knew her son when he came to visit. These are called windows of lucidity, and they are precious when they come, a poignant reminder of the past.

One evening just after supper, I placed her in the middle of the couch to rest. I always put two pillows on one side, and when she tired I would lay her down. She would nap a little (she hated to be in bed), then wake, sit up for a while, then lay on her other side. While she was sitting there one day I noticed her slump over, so I went to check and found her limp and almost unresponsive. Johnny and I put her in the wheelchair and it was evident there was a change. She could not help to stand at all. We quickly put her to bed. Mildred was already registered with Hospice, so I did not need to call anyone just yet.

Even though she was not responding, I gave her a bed bath, then rubbed her legs and feet with lotion. Just as I pulled the covers up and tucked them around her, she sighed and said, “You are such a doll!” Those were the last words she ever said. What a thank you, and, yes, you’re a doll too, I wanted to say. We called her family and they came, but she did not wake for them.

Mildred’s heartbeat was slow and her blood pressure low. I had a feeling that this would be her final call. The hospice nurse came and stayed with us and Mildred, and at about two in the morning she passed away. I was glad for the company of the nurse.

A few days later we attended Mildred’s funeral in a little town just up the road from us. It was a cold day with a few flakes of snow falling. Mildred’s extended family was there, with some friends as well. The minister of the church she had attended had a nice message, with one memory that impressed me. He said that when Mildred was beginning to become ill, she would show up at the church and sit all alone in the pews and sing four or five songs, then quietly go home, walking as she loved to do. He said it always blessed his heart to hear that as he sat in his office preparing a sermon.

I asked Mildred once if she prayed to Jesus and she said, “Yes, I do and it helps me to sing too.” It was a privilege to care for one of God’s little ones.

There is a battle to win, and there is victory for all if we say “yes” to the call and find Jesus as our personal Savior. This we found a blessing above all when a grandpa or grandma came to the last days of the Great Battle with joy in their eyes and a smile on their faces.

I will write how one dear grandma ended her time. When Susan first came to our home, she had a problem with habitual bad language. She said what she thought in her own words. Yet her attitude toward us was good, so we kept loving her and gently caring for her.

We always had prayer at the table, which Susan respected. She began to love our way of visiting and also loved to have our children and grandchildren come to visit. At first, the little ones were a little afraid of her ways, crude but loving. But they soon learned to head for her corner when they came over. She gave them candy, but whispered to them, “Don’t tell your mom!”

Soon the children would stay sitting on the arm of her chair, just to visit. Or you would find them kneeling in front of her walker, just to talk. She loved it more and more! When the little ones came in the front door, she would say, “Come over here so I can conk you one.” But when they came, the conk turned into a loving hug. We all loved her very much.

When we would sing a prayer song (especially when our children were visiting), her eyes had an excited beam in them. As we finished with a harmonious “Amen,” she would always look at all of us and slowly say, “Now, that’s what I call singing.”

But as Susan went from walker to wheelchair, and finally to being bedfast, her will to live faded away. The day before she left us, Adeline stirred her to waken her, and asked her, “Do you know who I am?” She answered sweetly, “Yes, the gentle people.” That was her goodbye.

Remember James 5:11, “The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” Also 1 Peter 3:8, “Having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.”

Johnnie and Adeline Toews, Mill City, Oregon

Dear Readers,

When this newsletter first came out, I thought it might be rather boring. How wrong I was! Even though I am not involved in caring for the elderly, so many articles speak to me. The content is inspirational and the writing excellent. Keep up the good work!

Every day there are elderly passing, a generation of stories and lessons being buried. How many of us have the stories of our fathers and mothers on paper? You should hear the stories my 80 year-old dad tells my girls! There are stories of threshing crews, and chasing skunks, and driving with horses, and walking three miles to school, and many more I wish I could remember. The girls are always asking for “one more story about when you were a boy!” It is so interesting and foreign to them that it’s like it’s out of a book. Do we have these stories written down? I have given

my dad one of those grandpa memory books but he hasn’t filled it out. Time is passing and soon that generation will not be here to tell their stories. Then they will be gone forever from our children and their children.

Years ago when I was researching creative writing for my students, I came across a unique book on the subject. This book was about creative writing for older folks. The author was a teacher who did a creative writing experiment with the residents of a nursing home. I do not remember details, but I do remember how astounded everyone was at the results, not only with the stories that came forth, but also with the sense of purpose the project gave the grandpas and grandmas. They were being heard; they were important too!

Can you imagine how any one of us would feel if we were transplanted into the former era of our grandparents? How well would I do on a threshing crew? It wouldn’t matter how computer literate I was, my contributions wouldn’t matter much. Don’t you think our elderly feel their contributions don’t matter in our fast age? They must feel they’re behind and they could fade away because their qualities don’t count anymore. As the article entitled “Gathering the Gleanings” in the last issue of this paper said, “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.” I wonder if our elderly know how much we need their stories and wisdom! [Editor’s note: the last issue spoken about here came out about six months ago because of a lack of contributions.]

I haven’t thought this through, but I know there are good ideas out there and all the resources we need to get some of these stories down. If we cannot think of questions to ask our loved ones, there are grandpa and grandma memory books available in Christian book stores and other places. Wouldn’t it be a source of conversation to write down a few of grandpa’s meandering memories each time we visit? A grandchild could help, or a widow in the congregation that has time on her hands. Maybe some former teachers could get together and have a creative writing class and some volunteers from the congregation could help write for those who couldn’t do it. Using today’s technology, we could print some of these stories in readable copy. What a sense of worth for the writer and a legacy of wisdom for the receiver!

I would like to hear others’ input on this subject and put some wheels under the ideas.

Marianne Kenagy, Jamesport, Missouri

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.
