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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*

## Note from the Editor

This issue of the Conference Care Facilities newsletter includes two articles about the beginnings of some of our homes. One, from the Valhaven Home at Abbotsford, discusses the process of change experienced by one of our older facilities. This process is probably quite typical of our established homes.

The other one is from our brand new facility in Bonners Ferry. The writer shares the process and complications of getting started.

Take note also of the article entitled “Heaven’s Waiting Room.” What more noble or exciting place to serve could there be than in God’s own waiting room?

We, as the Conference Care Facilities Committee, wish you a happy and a blessed career of caring.

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## Caring For Our Own

An article in a previous *Conference Care Facilities Newsletter* entitled “Our Vision” reminded me of something that I heard some years ago at a Mennonite Health Conference. One of the speakers pointed out that in the history of the Mennonites, starting back in Russia and Germany, the vision the people had was one of servitude and thus a strong conviction to “care for our own.” The speaker also stated that the service of caring for others was not to be for financial gain. I thought, well, that makes sense! That’s why we own and operate our own facilities with the focus being on caring for our own. We are a people who believe in doing “...it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40).

I believe that many of our facilities may have had their beginnings with this inspiration. I can believe that the majority would have considered the operation a success if adequate care could be provided and the expenses and

income worked out more or less equal. Profit need not be a goal although a sharp pencil can put away some monies for unexpected expenses. Just enough income to buy the groceries and supplies and a bit more to do the repairs and maintenance of the building, which may have been built by volunteer labour on donated property, is probably how many of our facilities got started. Volunteers did the yard work and tended to the flowers. The ladies from the church put up some preserves for the kitchen. Vegetables were grown in a little garden plot in the back yard and tended to by some of the more able residents. A generous donation bought some fruit trees which produced fruit to be put into the freezer for the winter. The caregivers spent the night at the facility, but were free to leave the premises during the day. A few of the men folk who resided there did the day to day maintenance and also repaired the lawn mower when needed. The parking lot accommodated the cars which belonged to some of the people who lived there. Most of the ladies cleaned their own rooms. The laundry was done in the basement by those ambitious enough to go up and down the stairs. The meals were planned, prepared, and served by some of the ladies who made this their home. Thus, a “home” for our own was born. How wonderful! It was a place for our elderly to go when the farm and all of its responsibilities became too much for them.

But progress and change happen. The needs for our “own” increase. The operation of the facility takes a turn. A nurse is hired for a few hours a week to help administer medications and arrange for doctor appointments, etc. There’s a vacancy, a new resident moves in, and a nurse needs to do an assessment. An administrator comes on board to manage the place. The ladies who worked in the kitchen grow weary, so a cook is hired, followed by a housekeeper and a laundry person. The nurse needs some assistance so a care aide joins the facility. The outside work is somewhat neglected, so “let’s hire someone to do it and then we won’t have to worry about it anymore.” But guess

what! This someone wants to be paid wages along with the administrator, nurse, care aide, housekeeper, and laundry person. That's only fair, isn't it? More people in the community need a place to go. Should we add some rooms? Of course! We want to take care of our own plus. And so it goes! The community has observed our operation and they like what they see. Operating funds are offered. Should we accept? Consideration is given. Hospital beds would benefit some of the residents, a tub and a lift would be very helpful, a med cart would keep the medications secure, and the list goes on. The extra funding would certainly ease the financial challenge that this beautiful place has become. And so the dream evolves to what it is today. Still a "haven for our own" but different than when it all began.

Valhaven Home in Abbotsford, BC, opened its doors in 1970. It began with 20 rooms, and 6 more were added in 1990. The local Health Authority provides subsidy for 22 beds and 4 are private pay which means they are not subsidized by the Health Authority. Valhaven is situated in a beautiful rural setting with large maple trees and lush green lawns. Flowering bushes surround the building, giving a stunning view from all of the rooms. Some of the residents have come directly from their farm or home in the country and the peace and quiet surrounding Valhaven is often a continuation of where they came from.

Valhaven is operated by Communities Supportive Care Society. There is a staff of about 45 people who provide care for 26 residents using the "Gentle Teaching" motto of making each one feel "safe and loved."

The challenge continues—operating within budget, staffing, building repairs, etc. But the feedback is so rewarding!

"We're so happy that Mom can live here!"

"It's so homey."

"The food smells so good!"

The staff is so caring."

"We as a family want to thank you for the wonderful care that you provided for Dad. He loved it here."

The residents have truly become "our own."

Lorraine Lenchuk, Valhaven Home, Abbotsford BC

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## Identity

We each have an identity—a way that we describe ourselves. Without giving it much thought, fill in the blank. "I am a \_\_\_\_\_." Some fill the blank with "farmer" or "mother" or "homemaker" or "minister." Some women have immaculate houses. They say, "I am a cleaner." Some people enjoy studying, and all their lives they say, "I am a reader."

Our identity issues are sensitive areas. If we are criticized in connection with our identity, the matter is more difficult to bear than criticism in an area that isn't as personal.

Our identities change over the years. Sometimes we

view those changes as positive, and it's not difficult to let go of the old identity. Sometimes those changes bring a deep sense of loss, and it is very difficult to let go of the old and find a new identity.

Our identity issues make a difference in how we face difficulties and make adjustments. If the problems we face affect our identity, the problem is more difficult. What happens when a singer loses his voice? When a reader goes blind? When a writer can't hold a pen or manage a keyboard? When a minister can't preach a sermon?

One of the last things we do in life is move to a nursing home. Some people seem to expect it, and others are surprised when that becomes necessary. Some find it easy to adjust to the new circumstances and some never really do, even though they try hard to be cheerful and thankful. Part of the reason for these differences lies with our identity issues.

Typically, a man retires from making a living long before he moves into a nursing home. And, for the most part, he is used to someone else doing his cooking, cleaning, and laundry. So when he moves to a nursing home, his daily activities hardly change. If he can accept his need for personal care from the nurses, his adjustment to a nursing home will perhaps not be too difficult.

It can be different for a woman, and probably the most difficult for a wife. Until the day she enters a nursing home, she thinks of herself as a homemaker. Due to her failing health, she probably isn't actually doing very much anymore, but she tries to do everything she can. Then she enters the nursing home, and it is all so different. Now someone else does the cooking, cleaning, laundry, and grocery shopping. Who is she now?

I'm not sure our nursing homes can do anything to make things easier for her. Some homes try to make things more home-like, and give residents opportunity to do more for themselves. But healthy, able bodied people do not live at nursing facilities. Rather, the residents are those who need the care that a nursing home gives. Perhaps the biggest thing a nursing home staff can do is acknowledge the resident's identity, or loss of identity. They cannot make it so that she can be in her own home again, but they can try to understand her loss, and maybe even help her to find a new identity for the time she has left on earth.

Susan (Mrs. David) Renno

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## Heaven's Waiting Room

I work in Heaven's Waiting Room. What a high calling! I feel immensely privileged to be among the number that works there! It is probably as close to heaven as we can get here on earth. Don't get me wrong; I don't mean that Bethel Home in itself is that wonderful. I just mean that those dear ones that we take care of every day are just one step from that shining city. We stand at their bedsides and watch with wonder as they turn their eyes

upward. We will never know for sure, but by the look of joy that crosses their faces, one wouldn't doubt but think that they are seeing things far beyond. How could one get closer to heaven? We stay behind in the waiting room and sadly watch as one by one our friends are called. Something of this just thrills me. Even now as I write, somewhat of a shiver runs through me.

I imagine one of our hospital waiting rooms. There is an air of expectancy about it. Everyone sits quietly waiting for the door to open and the nurse to beckon to the one whose turn it is to see the doctor next. We may be sitting there looking at a magazine, but we all know our time is coming and we are ready at the sound of the door to quickly lay it aside and answer the call. That is what we came here for.

In a way this is like our everyday lives; we don't know when it will be our time to go. But I am thinking more of our loved ones that have lived a full life and now in their sunset years are waiting to go Home. I work here among this group of dear ones, trying to make their wait as pleasant as possible. It isn't all pleasant for me or for them. Sometimes we don't know why it is that they suffer so much before they can go where their hearts long to go. Sometimes their minds and all reasoning has left them and we look on and wish that they could go, but we must see something deeper than just the outside body; there is a living soul that is still waiting. That is why this is more than just a job to me. We are counted among the elite to work here. What sort of job would you rather have than working in Heaven's Waiting Room? Why, even if the pay isn't so good, it is still a wonderful job because it is working for our King, right next to heaven!

I smile to myself when I hear someone scoff and say, "You work in a NURSING HOME!?! How can you?!" It does no good to explain. I would tell them, but their minds are closed. They give a disgusted shudder and turn away when I try to tell them of the joy and wonder there is in smoothing the hair of someone you know has just answered the call to enter paradise. Just take the old wrinkled hands of the one sitting in the recliner and, holding them in your own, think of all those hands have done. They have worked hard in their day to serve their families—sewing, cooking, cleaning, saving every penny because times were tough. These are the hands that worked for me! They are my ancestors, my heritage, and so they had a place in me being where I am today. Where would the Church be today if the hands of our older ones had not filled their places faithfully? Now they lie quietly folded in their laps, just waiting, waiting for an even higher calling. What can I do but try to give back to them the little bit that I can, now that life's toils are past for them and they are patiently waiting?

Oh, I do not feel worthy of such a wonderful job! God has been good to me to bring me here! Is it all roses? It is not! But then, if it was, it wouldn't be real life. Life has unpleasant times and trying circumstances, and it will as long as we live in this old world below. But for now I am

happy to be a worker for God in Heaven's Waiting Room.  
A worker at Bethel Home, Montezuma, Kansas

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## The Advocate

In 1 John 2:1-6, Jesus, our advocate, cared about our sinful condition. "...we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world..." If we think of these verses to mean souls who are burdened with sickness, disease, or old age, we can see that they need to have someone to notice them, and speak for them. Here is an example.

We looked at the new resident in our care home as she walked along with her walker. We were just getting acquainted with this very unique and interesting lady. But something was not right. We looked again. Her face was badly swollen. It looked like an allergic reaction so we gave her a dose of Benadryl. This seemed to help and the swelling went down. But in a few days it happened again and this time she had trouble breathing. Her lips were swollen to three times their normal size, as well as her tongue. She could not eat normally.

In the meantime we had looked up all her medications and their side effects and interactions. Yes, there was one medicine that could have exactly this side effect. I called the doctor and he suggested giving her Benadryl. We did this and it helped again, but not entirely. Some swelling stayed, making her miserable. Now what?

I spoke to the nurse about her condition and asked if we could try a different medication. She spoke to the doctor and he came to the conclusion that she may not even need that particular medicine she was taking. It was discontinued and there were no more problems. She could enjoy her food again; she could swallow easily and breathe easily. We were relieved as we watched her enjoying life again. We were her advocate with the doctor.

Now, I want to say at this point that, whether you are taking care of a loved one at home or in a facility, the attitude we have toward those in authority is highly important to our success. Jesus speaks to the Father for us, He intercedes for us, gives Himself for us, but at no time does the Word suggest that Jesus tells the Father what to do. One time I became frustrated and demanded an answer from authority. This did not work as they did not want to listen to me anymore, and an apology was in order. I walked very softly for a time until confidence was restored.

There are four things, at least, that the Lord helped me to see: be truly non-resistant at heart; report clearly and concisely; suggest change in a non-demanding way; and, perhaps most important of all, leave a supportive thank you, even for just listening or being there. This attitude seemed to have the blessing of God, as well as reducing my stress level very much.

Here is one more example. It happened to be the same resident as the above, and she was declining in her ability to

walk and get into and out of a vehicle. To take her to the doctor by medical transport made her scared and unhappy. Now what to do? There is a method called STOP.

S—see the problem.

T—talk about the problem.

O—observe the interventions (are they working?)

P—problem solved (or maybe, in some cases, eased or accepted).

The above lady's problem was clear and understood by her family, and they shared the concern with us. But the visits to the doctor were not productive. We talked it over and decided to SUGGEST moving to a Home Health Visit Program. The daughter was very much in favor.

By this time the doctor's nurse and I could talk things over comfortably, so I called her and mentioned the problem and also other little things that did not show up in the doctor visits. She said she understood but her suggestion was to put her in a nursing home, which was not the family's wish. So I suggested an alternate plan of having a home health nurse RN come out on a regular basis, evaluate the patient when she came, and make a report to the doctor. The nurse talked to the doctor about the family's wishes and he agreed to the plan.

We were all rejoicing and our dear little Grandma spent years of relaxed living in our home. The problem was solved to the satisfaction of all concerned.

I cannot stress enough that we need an open, Holy Spirit filled mind when dealing with problems. As we try our different ideas (some may never have been thought of before), it can be a joyful challenge and we learn a few things for our own lives too. I have often been reproved by the loving acceptance of my poor efforts, and it humbles me. May God receive the glory as we each fill our little place.

Written in weakness,

Mr. and Mrs. John Toews, Scio, Oregon

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Congratulations to Sunset Home Assisted Living in Bonners Ferry, Idaho! The long awaited day has arrived. The new building is finally complete. Notice has come at last that we, the new employees, all need to begin our task of getting started with our employee health checks, etc.

So off we go as busy as worker bees on a summer day, humming and buzzing, flying from one blossom to another, dusting our feet with pollen and nectar. Just like the bees, we hope to make a fruit with seed in it. The bees cannot live without the plant, nor can a plant live without the bees. May the seed we sow grow into a plant like that. We ourselves cannot live without God giving us the ability to do our tasks each day, and giving us love to serve Him and a caring heart to care for our elderly. We plant the seed as we care for the residents and we hope that the facility they move into will become a HOME for them

Our administrator, Duane Holderman, has been busy doing his job. Our RN, Priscilla Holdeman, has been doing her share of paperwork so the activities of the home can be

in line, working together with the facility board members and others.

On January 5, 2013, our administrator and our nurse met us at the new facility door with a big welcome smile. They cheerfully greeted each of us by name as we all entered the building, and they handed us our class schedules and employee training manuals. With excitement and anticipation we began a month of training on policy, resident assistance, CPR, and medications.

Then we waited for the state to give us the clearance to open the doors. Announcement of opening day finally came and we were given our work schedules. Opening day was March 3, 2013. That was our first day of work. The nurse was busy with our first admission, as well as getting the book work and payroll in order.

Our new residents moved into the new home with mixed feelings, getting used to the surroundings. The families were just as busy getting their loved ones settled in and fixing up the rooms for them. It's a big job, helping with the adjustments. People stop by for a visit, have a meal with the residents, and others come to sing.

The employees adjust to our work schedules of cleaning, laundry, housekeeping, and cooking. Each shift has chores to do. At times there is still confusion, but we are getting it all worked out as time goes by.

Resident activities are all scheduled on the board. There are exercises to keep the residents young, men's and ladies' coffee shop which rings with laughter, story hour and games, ladies' singing group with visiting afterward, and singing in the evening to end the day with a blessing. There is always a puzzle to be set by residents and visitors. Some like to do crosswords, Sudoku, or word searches. Puzzle books are always on the lamp table beside the chairs in the living room, as well as books to read in the book case.

On sunny days the residents like to sit out on the porch, watching the school children at recess or the youth ball games. Or they will just sit, relax, and look at the beautiful Goat Mountains, the cliff view with snow on it, with Black Mountain right beside it. It's a lot to take in. Soon they will be watching the crew doing landscaping and putting the trees and flowers into their places.

The motto on the wall has 1 Peter 5:7 on it, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." I am in awe as the dawn begins each day. The light is different each morning, the birds begin to sing, and I think of God's wonderful plan and how He gave us the ability to be thankful and enjoy life.

Nancy Peaster, Bonners Ferry, Idaho

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*Conference Care Facilities Newsletter* is published when possible 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. Send change of address or quantity to Lowell Koehn, Burns, KS; [leeprinting@eaglecom.net](mailto:leeprinting@eaglecom.net).