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# Conference Care Newsletter



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Vol. 7 • No. 1 • February 2016

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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

Recently our children and grandchildren made a scrapbook for us. Perusing through it, we experience a variety of emotions. So much is portrayed in different ways, and so much is brought to mind “between the lines.” On her page, one granddaughter has a lady hanging onto the hand of a clock. In another spot, the same lady is pictured in an hourglass. She has pushed her legs through the small opening, stopping the sand from running through. “Turn backward, turn backward, oh, time, in your flight.” Those are some of the words beside the illustration. What is the granddaughter thinking? What was the writer of the poem thinking?

Every era in a person’s life has its own particular challenges: childhood, the teens, the being-of-age era, early marriage, making a livelihood, family life, retirement and the senior era, or the countdown. Which age is most important? Where is life’s course set? Does each person have equal opportunity to make a success of life?

What is most important in each “time of life”? What is common to each era? Do we look at spirituality, social success, health, financial success, or should we look in the areas of happiness, contentment, and fulfillment?

Growing up is tough. Teenage years are stressful. Accepting responsibility is burdensome. Marriage is not only a bed of roses. And raising a family is really challenging. Midlife is crises time, and retirement is an extension of the crises. And after the crises comes the era when people become conscious of the passing of time.

On the threshold of each era, a person anticipates change. I remember several instances when my mind lurched at the reality of what was happening—like the end of school life or friends moving on. I remember the children growing up; no more hair to comb, no more bicycles, driver’s license

time, marriage time, no more children in the house, changing occupations, retirement—the beginning of slowing down. Every few years brought changes. But it was what we expected. It was life. The lurches were fleeting. Why? Because with each new era came change, and each change brought new and exciting opportunities. Did we actually want to be teenagers forever? Did we want the responsibility of providing a livelihood forever?

But sometimes we get bogged down with change, and we resent it. I don’t want to accept responsibility, so I try to be a teenager when I’m thirty. Training children is difficult, so I slack off and wonder why home life is tough. Children leave, and I’ve failed them, and I regret it, but I can’t redo it, so I’m lonesome when the house is empty. I face retirement, but I can’t let go. Who will listen to me now? Where will I fit in? So I hang in there.

When my father moved off the farm, he would often go back and help my brother with some of the day-to-day tasks. One day when working the cattle, he told me he had suddenly noticed the boys, at least they were boys in his eyes, waiting on him. He simply said, “I caught on.” I remember my own thoughts on my way to help our son with a job where another hand was needed. I had the steps of the task more or less figured out by the time I got there. When I arrived, he simply told me what he wanted me to do; roles had changed.

Business owners, leaders, ministers, song leaders, employees, and, really, any of us are sometimes reluctant to lay down responsibility when it’s time. We are fearful of change, afraid what will happen if others take responsibility. Then in the waning years, there is a lack of contentment and the strain to face reality, because we hardly could in the productive years.

We’re all approaching the “big change.” Are we apprehensive as we contemplate taking the last step? Sure, we have never experienced this before. What will it be like?

But then we only had one chance at all the rest of life's changes as well, and how did we handle them?

Enjoying each time of life is vital to helping us deal with changes that we will face in the future. We live in the present, not in the past or in the future. Another excerpt from the scrapbook is, "God is not 'I was.' He is not 'I will be.' God is 'I am.'"

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### A Complete Life

Some years ago I was assigned to do some research regarding the health of the folks under our care in our facility (Maplewood Manor). In my research, I got hold of a book, *Another Country* by Mary Pipher. I learned much from it, and it has significantly influenced this writing. It's one I would highly recommend. Applying its message will make your life richer.

I have heard it said, "I don't know why I need to get involved; I have no old folks in \_\_\_\_\_." You finish that sentence. That may be true.

Do you have babies in your life? Well, yes, grandchildren; we love to visit our grandchildren and, oh, my neighbor's child! I love to see the print of a small hand on my window. Even when the child has long gone, that image takes me to the child. I have seen the little mind's motor humming when he has tried to place a square object into a star shape. Soon he drops it and tries again with something else. It makes me smile.

And the schoolchildren. Don't you love to go past a schoolhouse at recess? And the sound that emanates from that space—as engaged and energetic as their bodies? That's thrilling. I love it.

As life moves on to youth, we observe their social interactions. They are so lovely and strong. We hear of their communion with the Lord, and we marvel. We learn again that God is true to His promises.

Young and middle adulthood moves along the escalator of time. From one vantage point, we can say this is when we do our life's work. We are the "keepers" of society. Perhaps we aren't as much observed as we observe.

And finally, comes old age. For some reason, we draw a blank. We haven't been there. We plead ignorance.

We look on old age. It has so many bumps and wrinkles; as Ms. Pipher says, "We have become a 'lite' society." We've left the "tough." And we've taught our six-year-old that as well. Stereotypes are forming by the age of six. And so, as the many authors I have read state, "We put our old into their own category; assign that age group adjectives like *slow*, *depressed*, *demented*. When we're asked to go to an old folks' home, we do our perfunctory service, shake a few hands, perplexingly look around, and then, with a sigh of relief, go for coffee."

Here is a surprise. When a class of young children were paired with cognitively intact elders at an old folks home on

a weekly basis, they became fast friends. They shared stories. One read to the other. When one elder was missing, it was very sad for everyone. Again Ms. Pipher observes, "Put ten two-year-olds together, and there will be a squabble; put ten people of all ages together, and the atmosphere is one of nurturing. Values deepen and experiences grow richer."

Try it. It's not hard. Here's what you do: Show them respect. Allow them to engage in conversation of life review. They love questions that connect them to their time. Start with questions like: "Where were you when \_\_\_\_\_? What was your first car like?" Ask about objects. Take them to a bench outdoors. "Doing something" enhances conversation. Bring food. Talk about people in their lives. And by all means, bring children, even a baby. They may not have held a baby for a long time. And when you say good-bye, take your time. Leave them with a happy memory.

You will come away having seen them standing tall and strong, perhaps stripped of leaves and flowers even as their bodies prepare for winter. They will richly reward you. They will leave you with two gifts: complete acceptance and a treasure of memories. No, three: marveling at their strength midst weakness. And your life will be complete. All ages and all graces will be yours.

Fran Giesbrecht

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### Following are some highlights taken from presentations and discussions at the October 2015 Conference Care Meeting

- Many residents simply need a little attention. They are often waiting for opportunities to talk.
- More nurses are needed for our facilities.
- Community support is a fundamental need for a facility to operate well.
- Aging is a triumph, not a disease.
- Residents like to feel useful.
- Devotion time is a valuable activity for resident well-being.
- Singing groups are inspirational.
- Private rooms give residents opportunity for social life with family and friends.
- The eleventh commandment: "A new commandment I give to you, that you shall love one another."
- Experiences of starting new homes are educational.
- According to a resident's calculations of a son's performance, he would see her only six more times before she died. Where are our priorities?
- A bus fall-color tour was like cream to coffee for residents in a care home.
- The theme for the main meeting was "The Future of Elder care."
- How will we meet the challenges?
- The person is more important than the task.
- Being open and realistic regarding end of life is important.

- Personal agendas should not be pushed.
- Full-care beds in the conference have not increased like membership has.
- There is a need for more full-care beds.
- Do we understand what kind of an aging population is looming on the horizon?
- A business enterprise either grows or dies.
- We can become complacent, enjoying the current moments, but what about the future?
- It's the employees that count.
- New employees blossom under nurture and acceptance.
- Roses and one-hundred-dollar bills speak for years.
- What skills do you have for the position we are offering you? Tell us about yourself. What are your strengths and weaknesses? Can you be cheerful under stress? If not, you might want to find a job elsewhere.
- Purposeful activities provide feelings of worth and help occupy residents.
- The domains of well-being are engagement, connectedness, identity, security, autonomy, meaning, growth, and joy.
- Love for people and making a difference in peoples' lives are why we take on a job (DONs).
- Harassment policies. Employees should understand this, and policies should be in place.
- Why am I a DON?
- Hair colors and tattoos.
- Preservation of residents' dignity.
- Exercise programs and involvement of community, including children.
- Song: The Blessed Refuge, "Where the living waters gently flow."
- The call to care, to compassion, and to consecrate our service.
- The committee is a voice to help homes connect with each other. Our facilities are not islands. We want to provide inspiration.
- The cry of special-needs people is becoming stronger.
- The call is going out for Christians to care.
- How do nurses cope with stress?
- An assurance of salvation helps create a calm end-of-life atmosphere.
- It is our responsibility to care for our families. Mission is going down the road to our neighbors.
- Song: "Lord, I would not ask a special blessing." Very good choice of song for the meeting.
- It's normal to have butterflies while bringing a speech. To get them to fly in formation is the trick.
- Do I live each day to its fullness? "One hundred percent of shots not made don't go in" (Wayne Gretzky quote).
- Is it kind, necessary, and true? Praise loudly; complain softly.
- Activities bring residents together.
- Little things make big blessings.
- Activity directors live for the moment.
- Activities in a facility provide at least some experiences that elders lose when they leave home to live in a care home.

- The Conference Care Committee enjoyed the sessions and hospitality of the home folks.

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## The Resource Team

The Conference Care Committee would like to introduce the Resource Team. They were asked whether they would be open to this. There was really no comment, which was taken as tacit approval.

Needless to say, the Care Committee is thankful how the Resource Team is contributing to the effort of addressing the needs among us. They are open to be contacted and may have an understanding of your situation or may be able to point you in a direction that will help you. Listed are profiles of the people on the team.

**Mark Loewen (chairman):** mkloewen7585@gmail.com;  
Phone: 641-832-8263; Lime Springs, Iowa  
Has a 35-year-old son who is developmentally disabled, hearing impaired, and has a seizure disorder. Because of the challenges they have faced, he and his wife, Glenda, are interested in helping others with special needs.

**Lawrence Penner (secretary):** mtfawlbp@gmail.com;  
Pine River, Manitoba  
Lawrence and Bonny have been foster and adoptive parents since 1980. They have had many children of varying ages come through their home. The last number of years they have taken in teenagers who need a break from family, congregation, and/or environment. Individuals have stayed from six months to one and one-half years, one at a time.

**Ida Klassen:** idajayne@gmail.com; Linden, Alberta  
Since 2002, Ida has done individualized in-home therapy for children who have autism. She has experience in working with various professionals in this field. She teaches a parenting course and also has some knowledge of reactive attachment disorder.

**Helmut Herman:** helmut.herrmann@gmail.com;  
Enderby, British Columbia  
Helmut raised a daughter who had Down Syndrome and has been involved with local nonprofit organizations which consisted of parents of disabled children. He, also, was on the regional community council and a provincial council, both of which had involvement with advising government on policy and giving input on the needs and successes found in other places. Currently, he provides respite care for an elderly gentleman as needed.

**Marcus Durley:** mjdurley@gmail.com; Monterey, Tennessee  
Marcus has worked with children with behavior needs, with support groups, with families, and in the school system. He has counseling experience, working with adults, marriage counseling, and other social issues.

**Doetke Jager:** doet\_eke@hotmail.com; Artois, California  
Doetke has a bachelor's degree in teaching and special education. She worked at a day care for people with severe handicaps and was a substitute teacher for children with special needs. She has worked in our church schools for ten years as both a teacher in a regular classroom and in special education.

Vanessa Koehn: vkoehn02@gmail.com; Louise, Texas  
Vanessa is an occupational therapist assistant who has spent years working with physically disabled children in the public school system. She is now the director of the Christian Child Care Home in Gallup, New Mexico.

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### **From the Resource Team**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Greetings in Jesus' name. First, we want to say thanks for the response and support we have received in the past several months regarding our special-needs efforts. We have felt the Lord's blessings on these endeavors as we have sought His direction for our families with special needs. Please feel free to continue to communicate your needs and concerns to us as they arise. We have been touched and inspired by the many who have shared information and experiences from our congregations. This has resulted in developing a network of support and resources to offer our families.

As we receive continued feedback from different locations, a concern has arisen that might warrant some consideration. It seems that some of our children and others are being diagnosed without a qualified assessment. This could very easily lead to an improper treatment plan and frustrating outcomes. It is not our intention to direct our families in their choice of treatment plans but to assist them in seeking and securing the safest and most effective approaches to their loved ones' treatment.

In the field of health care, i.e., hearing, vision, dental, and/or medical needs, we seek and use the services of professionally qualified individuals to perform the examination. We generally feel comfortable with their assessment of our condition, and we follow the course they prescribe for us. This same principle is just as vital in the mental health/special needs fields. Our families need and deserve qualified assessment, treatment plans, and procedures as well; anything of lesser quality and competency will likely yield a less than desirable result.

A couple of areas that are a growing concern to us are: the increasing number of children in our congregations who have been labeled as having "reactive attachment disorder" (RAD). This is the extreme type of attachment disorder that children or individuals might have with attachment issues. RAD is considered to be a very small percentage of the population who have attachment issues. We are not trying to determine the diagnosis but to plead that your loved ones be properly evaluated by a qualified professional. The treatment plans for RAD can be very traumatic and should be administered by professionally qualified persons.

Biofeedback/neuro-therapy is another method of treatment that is being considered and used as an option for certain disabilities. We are neither promoting nor discrediting

this treatment plan. We are actively seeking more information and feedback regarding its potential effectiveness with certain disorders. We solicit your thoughts regarding this and other treatment options that have a sound, proven history of effectiveness. Our desire is to offer a safe path with qualified professionals to help our families. In closing, we submit these thoughts in weakness, seeking the Lord's direction and blessing in our labors.

Marcus Durley

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### **Greetings from the Care Committee**

As we cross the threshold of the New Year, we are reminded of new beginnings. At the same time, we look back and remember what we have experienced the past year. We have been challenged—all of us, personally and collectively.

In our reflections, we consider the people in our circles who are aging. We also think of those who face the challenges of special-needs people in their lives.

Special well wishes go to the above-mentioned folks. We are also wishing all the caregivers in our facilities special graces as they care for their people. We share the following anonymous quote with you:

A beautiful legend says that one day the angel of the flowers, the angel whose charge it is to care for the adorning of the flowers, lay down and slept beneath the shade of a rose bush. Awakening from sleep refreshed, he whispered to the rose,

O fondest object of my care,  
Still fairest found where all is fair,  
For the sweet shade thou gavest me,  
Ask what thou wilt, tis granted thee.

The rose requested that another grace might be given it. The angel thought in silence what grace there was in all his gifts and adornments which the rose had not already. Then he threw a veil of moss over the queen of flowers, and a moss rose hung its head before him, most beautiful of all roses.

If any Christian, even the Christliest, would pray for a new charm, an added grace of character, it might well be for gentleness. This is the crown of all loveliness, the Christliest of all Christly qualities.

God bless you all,

Steve, Ross, Patrick, Ron, Gideon, Jerry, and Tim

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*Conference Care 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 Tim Penner, editor, 64 First Street, Steinbach, MB R5G 2B6; Ph./Fax 204-346-9646; Cell 204-346-4048; e-mail: timbrenda@live.ca.

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