

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

“You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost ... ” – (Ezekiel 34:3-4)

Care

The prophet Ezekiel’s instructions to the Son of Man to exhort the “shepherds of Israel” about their willingness to care may not apply here. Care giving is something we certainly do, and as Christians we realize that we are called to care as a members of the community of Christ.

In many cases care giving is forced upon us by the illness or incapacitation of family or others who are close to us. Recent figures from the Pew Research Center place the number of people in the U.S. who are raising their children and caring for aging parents as a bit over one in eight. There is even an official month (July) to commemorate the “Sandwich Generation” of people in this position. In addition, seven to ten million of us are caring for aging or disabled parents from a distance.

Whether through choice or circumstances we find ways to provide care to others, often making it up as we go along. This kind of on-the-job training can be pretty tough on us as caregivers, affecting our plans, our finances, even our own health. Jane Barton, chaplain and educator for Denver Hospice (www.lifequalityinstitute.org/), recently did a presentation on care giving as part of the Living in Faith series at Bethany. One big insight that I took away from that presentation was that although we assume that we have all the tools we need when we are called on to provide care, the reality of what it takes to be a caregiver can be sobering and isolating.

Knowing that it can be terribly difficult to be self sufficient in providing care to another, or to predict future need, is it possible to plan differently for care giving? Barton, says, “Yes.” In much the same way as we can plan for retirement, illness, or other life circumstances we can plan for care giving for others or for ourselves. She referenced a book that was written by a group of women who came together to share caring for a terminally ill friend called *Share the Care* (www.sharethecare.org/). The book provides a step-by-step method to create a unique caregiver "family" of friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers and acquaintances. It also helps you answer that question from concerned friends and relatives when a crisis happens, “How can I help?”

As we have explored previously in this column, we are not alone. We live in the body of Christ -- a community that shares concern, skills for healing, and faith. It seems natural that creating communities of care is far from burdening others; it can help us help each other, and thus serve the mission given us by God’s teachings. *Shalom.* - JL

If you have ideas to share with us or are interested in the work of the Health and Wellness Cabinet, please contact Jack Lindsey: drjacklindsey@earthlink.net.