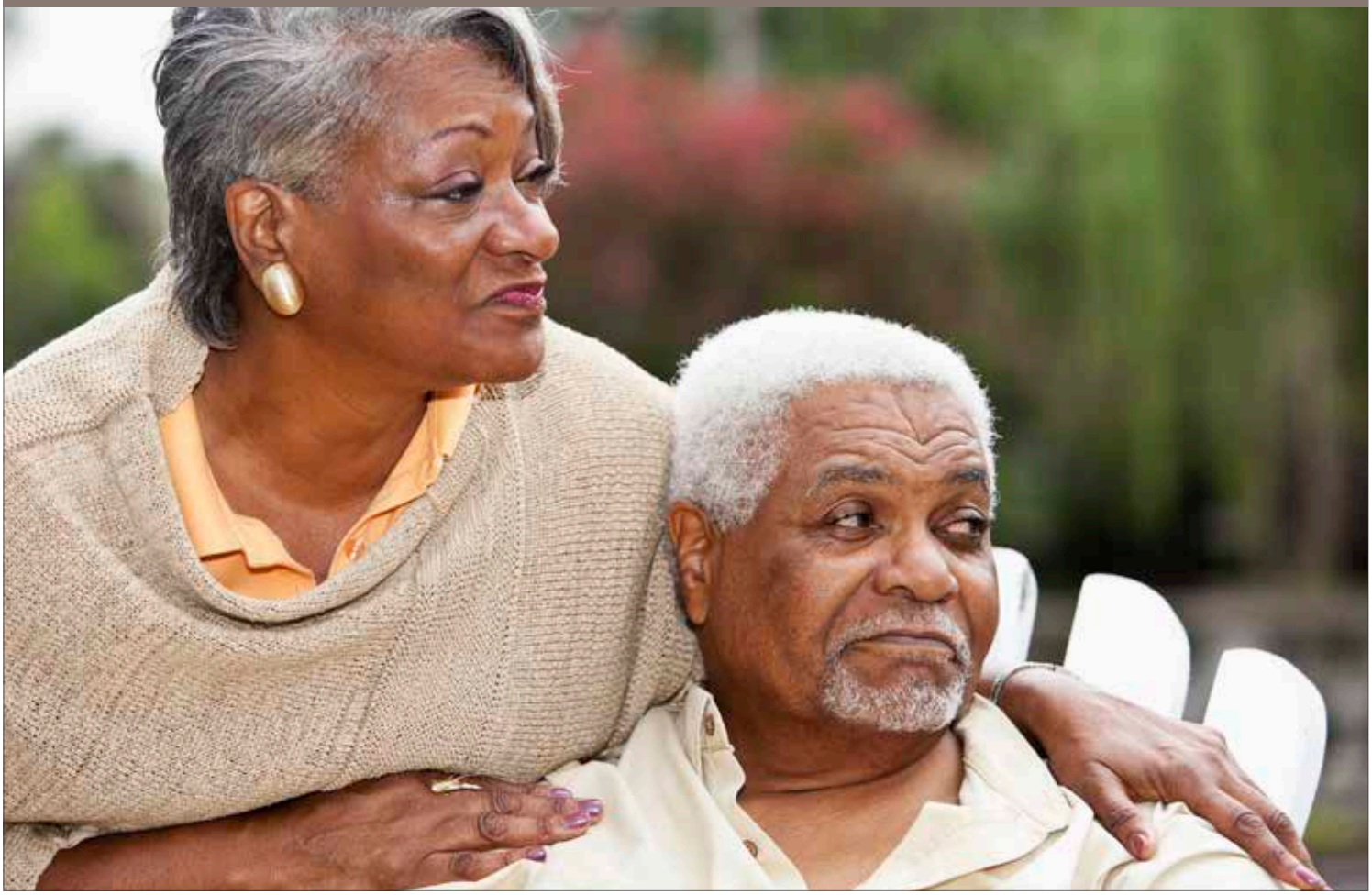
AARP

CC2C

CONNECTING CAREGIVERS TO COMMUNITY

COMMUNICATION TOOLS



AARP Family Caregiving™

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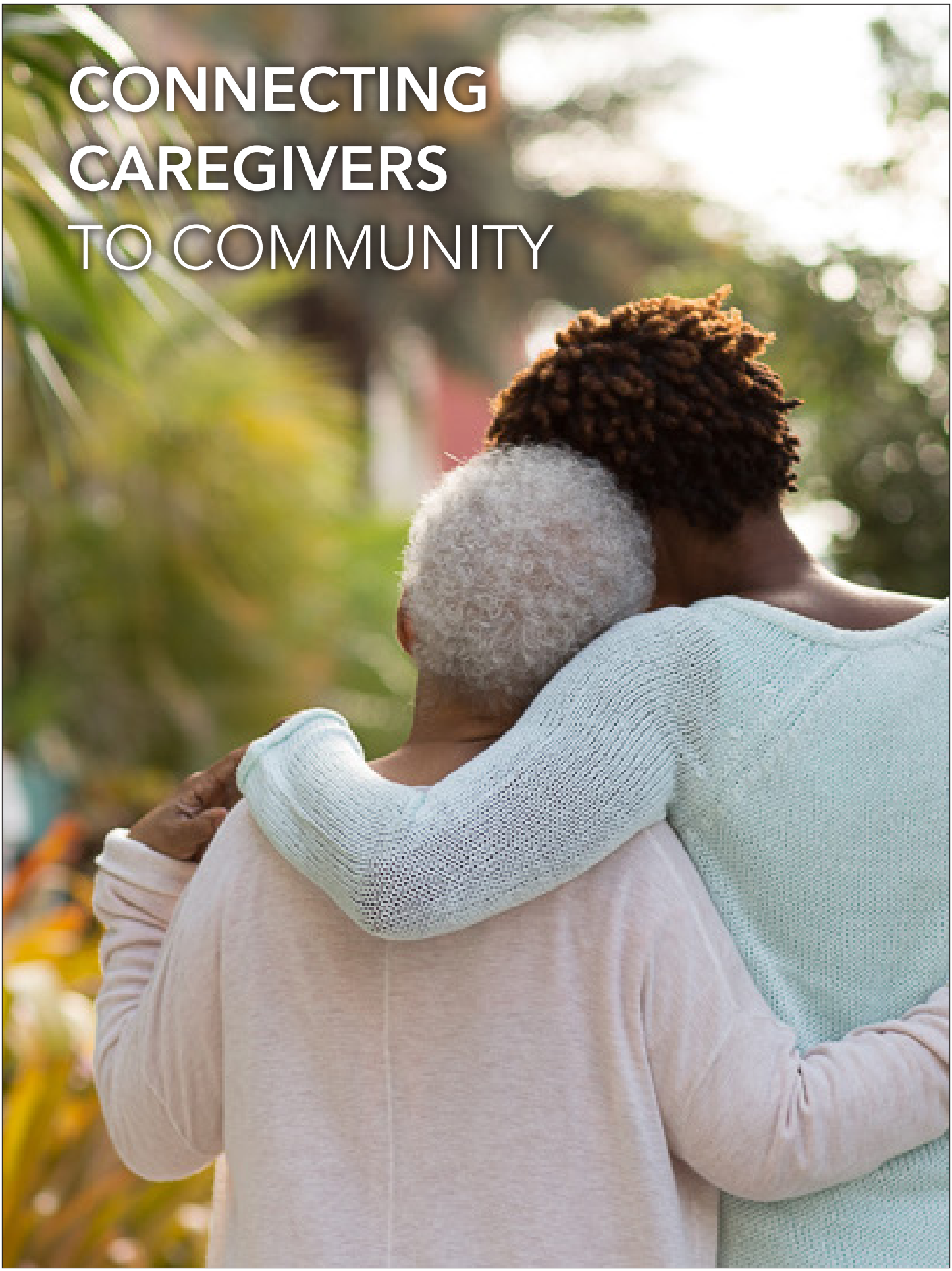
CONNECTING CAREGIVERS TO COMMUNITY



CC2C
COMMUNICATION TOOLS

This section provides communication strategies and sample language you can use to stay in contact with family caregivers in your congregation and community for six months. Although these activities are optional, we encourage you to consider having an on-going communications plan. Doing so will allow you to continually promote the program and provides another layer of support for your family caregivers. When your caregiving members regularly receive communication from church, they feel supported and less isolated— even if they cannot leave their home to attend programs.

You will also find that you can use the tactics recommended for other church priorities. These low cost, easy-to-implement ideas will result in increased relevance among your members. This section provides samples of:

- Bulletin articles
- Blog posts
- E-mails of Encouragement
- Text messages or tweets of hope
- Telephone inspirational messages

1

Church Bulletin Articles

Church Bulletin Articles summarize five main topics that family caregivers need to understand. These short educational articles are filled with helpful, practical information and have multiple uses. You can adapt them or use them as they are presented for a church bulletin insert. You can also post them on your church's website or blog. A great strategy is to circulate an article at the same time as you announce an educational seminar or the support group series.

Start the Conversation

We prepare for crises all the time. There is a reason children learn early on what to do during a fire. Even as adults we follow those same simple guidelines: exit the building quickly and quietly, take the stairs not the elevator and stand at a distance from the building. We prepare because in the unfortunate event of a real fire, though we may feel frightened, we need to know exactly what to do. Preparing for life's emergencies should be no different.

Caring for a loved one whose illness or advanced age has made it difficult for them to care for themselves can feel a lot like that fire. If we have not developed a plan and asked questions in advance, we may feel overwhelmed and scared when the time comes. Talking with your loved ones ahead of time takes some of the anxiety out of the experience.

Look for opportunities to introduce the topic with your loved one. It might start as a casual conversation or you may want to set aside a time to discuss your loved one's priorities and desires regarding his or her health and care.

It is important to remember that your loved ones should have input in the process and that their wishes as well as their safety need to be at the forefront of any decisions being made about their care. Once you have established your loved ones' priorities, you can begin to ascertain what types of resources and what level of support you may need as a caregiver. Looking at you and your loved one's finances is also a vital step when developing a care plan. Make sure to ask questions about your loved one's health, long-term care and disability insurance. Although there may be moments when your loved one is reluctant to discuss such a difficult and personal topic, remind him or her that you are doing this out of love and concern for their well-being.

For more information on how [Name of Church] is supporting family caregivers, please contact [contact info].

Form Your Team

We've all heard the expression, "It takes a village to raise a child." Well, the same is true when you are caring for an ill or older loved one. It is important to identify the members of your "village," or care team, and to work out the level of their contribution to the care of your loved one. Your team may include siblings or other family members; it may also include a community of close friends. The nature of each team member's relationship to the older person naturally will vary depending on the individual. Family history, past hurts or resentments may play a role; however, in a time of need and crisis, a family must come together. When disagreements occur, it may be helpful to bring in a neutral third party, such as a counselor or church leader. In the end, remember that it is out of love and concern that you must put aside your differences in order to provide the best possible care for your ill or older loved one.

We also know that family and friends may be located both near and far. Distance does not necessarily preclude a team member from helping out. In the case of providing care for a loved one, every little bit counts. Whether someone can offer one weekend a month or lives far away and can only schedule time during vacations, your team members can still provide support and care.

Work together to coordinate your schedules. Set up an online calendar and establish a phone chain. Delegate responsibilities— such as making phone calls or paying bills—that can be accomplished remotely to those who are farther away; while reserving other responsibilities—such as driving your loved one to doctor's appointments or doing household chores—to those who are close by.

Although you may feel hesitant to ask for help, remember that the opportunity to give back to a loved one in need is a rare and beautiful gift. Share that gift with your friends and family.

For more information on how [Name of Church] is supporting caregivers, please contact [contact info].

Make a Plan

Have you ever rushed to get to the airport before a family vacation or a business trip? You've got the car packed, everyone and everything is accounted for, and you hop into the car, drive half way to the airport, only to discover that you've forgotten the tickets? No matter how well we pay attention to the details, sometimes we can still miss the bigger picture. When caring for an ill or older loved one, sometimes we get caught up in the stress and complexity of that responsibility but forget the most important component: Your loved one!

Once you have established your team of fellow caregivers, come together with your loved one—either in person or electronically—and establish a care plan. There is no way to anticipate every single eventuality. Your plan does not need to be overly detailed or elaborate but should include a basic scaffold for making major decisions. Make sure that all parties have the same information so that no one feels left out of the loop. Be sure to respect your loved one's wishes and hear his or her input. He or she may have a preference regarding which of your friends or family members takes on certain roles. When your ill or older loved one is involved and remains an integral part of his or her care plan, he or she is more likely to feel respected, at ease and truly cared for.

For more information or support as you care for a loved one, please contact [contact info].

Find Support

Caring for an ill or older loved one can feel like being lost in the woods without a map or compass. Nothing seems familiar and even when you think you may have found a path, you are never quite sure if there is a better one. Although this experience may be new for you, there are people and resources dedicated entirely to making the responsibility of caregiving easier to bear. With a map and a compass, they are ready to walk this journey with you. Depending on your loved one's circumstances, he or she may be entitled to services and additional support through local and national organizations. Your loved one's doctor or social worker can help you locate these resources in our community. As always, [Insert Name of Church] has resources available for you, including [details (i.e., support group, information Event, workshops)].

For more information or support as you care for a loved one, please contact [contact info].

YOUR TEAM MAY INCLUDE SIBLINGS OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS OR CLOSE FRIENDS.

Care for Yourself

As a caregiver for an ill or older loved one, you will inevitably develop an expertise about all sorts of things, from pharmacy hours and medicine side effects to where to find the best sandwich within walking distance of the hospital. You might have your loved one's doctor's phone number memorized. When you get into your car, you automatically start driving to your loved one's home instead of your intended destination.

Caregiving can be a rich experience, but it can also take its toll on the caregiver. While you may become an expert in the care of someone else, you are likely to have trouble remembering to take care of yourself.

Family caregivers often feel hesitant about seeking help and support for themselves. However, it is probably in your best interest to let your employer, doctor, counselors and/or Minister know that you are caring for an ill or older loved one. They can help you limit or adjust your work schedule, manage stress and anxiety and find emotional and spiritual rejuvenation—all of which are essential parts of being a reliable and healthy caregiver. In addition to asking for help, look for ways to make caregiving easier on yourself. If you are traveling to care for your loved one, consider leaving some clothes and toiletries at your loved one's home to simplify your packing. Take time to write down important information so that you do not feel like you need to retain everything in your memory. Finally, no matter how near or far you are from your loved one, remember to give yourself a break from caregiving every once in a while. Make time to take care of your physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

For more information on how [Name of Church] is supporting caregivers, please contact [contact info].

2

Caregiving Blog Posts

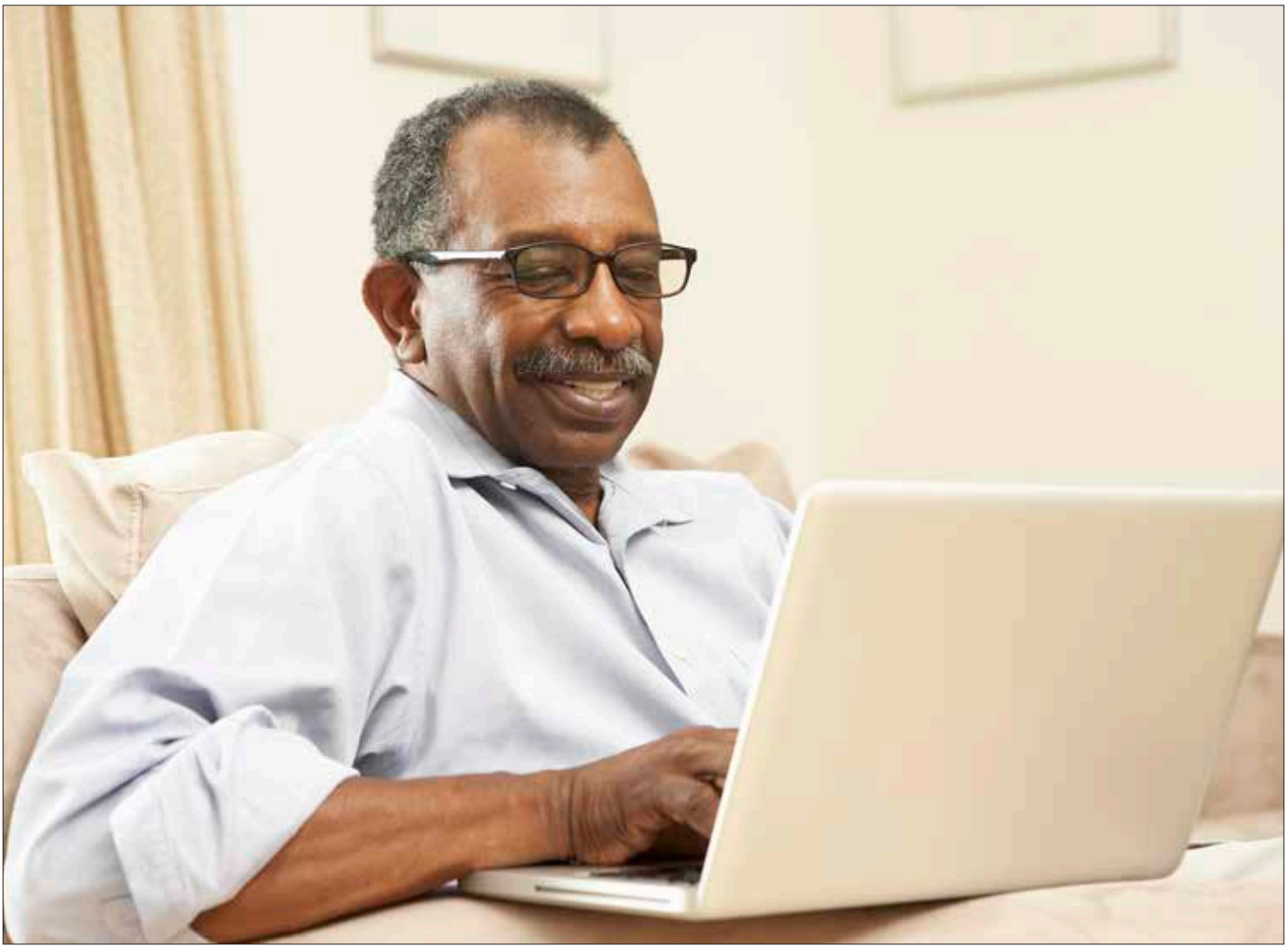
Caregiving Blog Posts are messages you can post to the church's blog. Although written as blog posts, these messages can be used in a variety of platforms. They can be used as bulletin inserts or e- mail messages or they can be edited to become church announcements. In addition, Ministers can use them as the basis for their caregiving messages from the pulpit.

[NAME OF CHURCH] ACKNOWLEDGES OUR CAREGIVERS

When a member of our community becomes unable to care for him or herself due to illness or advanced aging, it can be a particularly difficult time for that person's family. The days and nights spent praying, grieving, hoping and pleading with God take a toll on a caregiver's emotional and spiritual strength. The early mornings, jam-packed days and late nights traveling to and from the hospital are exhausting. The doctor visits add stress and anxiety to a caregiver's life. The lunch breaks spent picking up prescriptions, the weekends doing household chores at a loved one's home and other added responsibilities take a toll on a caregiver's health and well-being. Although they will be the last to tell you so, our family caregivers need care.

Supporting our brothers and sisters as they care for their ill or older loved ones is a special mission for [Name of Church]. Our dedicated and compassionate Caregiver Buddy Volunteers share their time to ease some of the burdens of caregiving and provide emotional, spiritual and logistical support.

In addition, we offer a caregiver support group [date, time, location] where caregivers can meet and uplift each other. We have educational workshops to provide caregivers with valuable information on how to handle [examples of topics]. Our informational event [date, time, location] gives family caregivers the opportunity to learn more about the resources that are available to them



and their loved ones. Finally, we honor our caregivers' commitment and strength at an annual dinner in [month]. If you are caring for an ill or older loved one, know that your family at [Name of Church] supports you and is waiting for you with open arms. For those members of our congregation who can offer their time and compassion to become a Caregiver Buddy Volunteer, contact [contact info] to further [Name of Church]'s mission to care for our caregivers. God bless!

YES, YOU ARE A CAREGIVER!

When life hands us a challenge, set-back or obstacle, we usually do not have much time to reflect. When a loved one becomes ill, or when his or her advanced age makes it difficult to care for him or herself, we immediately spring into action. We cut back on our hours at work and start our mornings an hour or so earlier. We visit our loved one in the evenings and on the weekends, take on more household chores, run errands and pay bills. These are the responsibilities that we add to our plate in times of crisis without a second thought.

REACH OUT TO YOUR **CHURCH FAMILY** TODAY AND LET US HELP YOU.

If you have become responsible in part or in entirety for the health, well-being and safety of an ill or older loved one, you may not have had to time to stop and realize that yes, you are a caregiver. What's more, you may not have realized that as a caregiver, you need—and have available to you—many types of support. Your family at [Name of Church] can help you. We have volunteers, resources and seminars that can provide the information and emotional and spiritual support you need to walk this journey. Reach out to your church family today and let us help you. [Contact info]. God bless!

ONE CAREGIVER'S STORY

Charity: In today's world, charity sometimes gets a bad rap. We give to charity rather than giving charity. Charity in our minds means "money" more than it means goodwill, kindness and love. And heaven forbid we should receive charity! Rather than seeing charity as receiving support and love from our community, we see it as a sign of weakness or failure.

As a family in faith, we should know better than to look down on charity. Giving charity is not simply a donation of money; it is sharing God's love within each of us with our brothers or sisters in need. I would like to share with you a story of how our church family came together to support one of our [brothers/sisters].

[Insert story of how the church supported a caregiver in the congregation].

I am proud to say that our family at [Name of Church] knows and shows the true meaning of charity every day. God bless you.

GOD IS A CAREGIVER

As a family in faith, we know to look for God in all things and in everyone. We know that the stranger we pass on the street or the child we hold in our arms could be a messenger of God in disguise. As I look out into our congregation, and especially at our family caregivers, I see many of God's own qualities shining through. He is unselfish and infinitely giving. He has given us the greatest gift—salvation—and continues to shower us with blessings every single day. He is patient with us when we lose our way, when we don't heed His words and when we stumble. He waits patiently for us, never wavering. He is resilient. God's strength knows no bounds. He protects us from harm and defends us against evil. He is our rock and our savior. Most of all, God loves us and His love for us is unconditional. No matter what our relationship with God is, He will never stop loving us because we are His children.

We know that in each of us God has created the capacity to be more like Him, for He created us in His image. Our fellow congregants who are caring for ill or older loved ones during their times of need share so many qualities with God. When we show kindness to the family caregivers in our church community we are showing God that we appreciate His unselfishness, patience, resilience and love toward us each and every day. God bless you.

3

Emails of Encouragement

Emails of Encouragement are short messages that can be sent to members on a monthly basis, preferably under the Pastor, First Lady or a Minister's signature. These emails are an easy way to keep members encouraged and engaged. They communicate care and concern for members. Feel free to modify them as needed. You may want to include updates from the church and attach photos from church activities. The content can also be used on the church's website.

EMAIL #1

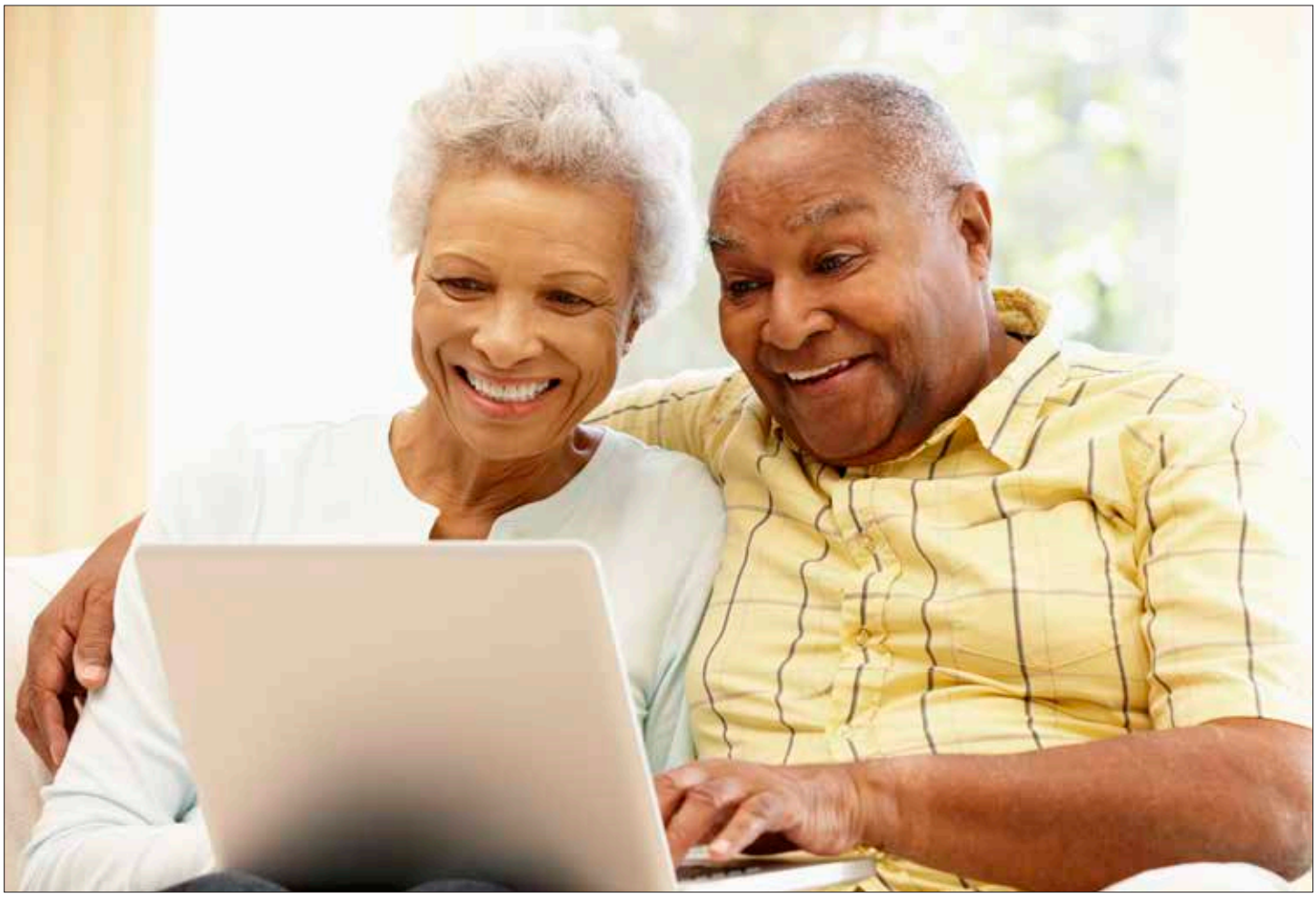
Subject: Godly Love

Dear [Congregant],

It is not always easy to stop and count our blessings. When caring for a loved one, the lost sleep and constant worry can make gratitude seem difficult, if not impossible. I want to remind you that, while some days will be harder than others, every day that you spend putting the needs of a loved one before your own is a day spent living God's love. Truly unconditional love is a rare and beautiful gift to receive, and is rarer still to give. In caring for your loved one, you have the unique opportunity to let God's love work through you. Let it fill you up! Let it buoy your spirits and banish your sorrow as you give thanks for the extraordinary gift of love. As always, know that your church family continues to pray for you and your loved one.

Prayerfully Yours,

[Pastor, First Lady or Minister Name]



EMAIL #2

Subject: Help Us Help You

Dear [Congregant],

Have you ever found yourself sitting on the couch in the evening, exhausted and wondering to yourself, "How did I do it all?" Do you ever wake up in the morning and think "I'm not sure I can make it through this day"? There is no doubt in my mind that a caregiver has regular thoughts like these. I am here to remind you that your family at [Name of Church] can help ease the burden on your shoulders. Whether it's preparing a meal for your family or running a few errands, we can help. Being a part of a family means having a responsibility to one another in times of need— no one knows the true meaning of family better than you do. Just as you are willing to give your time to help a family member in need, so, too, is your family in faith. Call on us, so that when you reach the end of your day the only thought that will come to mind is "Thank God for [Name of Church]!"

Prayerfully Yours,

[Pastor, First Lady or Minister's Name]

EMAIL #3

Subject: You Are Enough!

Dear [Congregant],

Being a caregiver means giving everything you have and still wanting to do and more. Caring for an ill or older loved one can bring about a host of emotions. We can feel torn between our other responsibilities—our families and jobs—and the responsibility of caring for our loved ones. It does not take long for feelings of self-doubt and guilt to creep in. If we listen for too long to our fears, we may even begin to believe them. However, as a person of faith, you have an inner strength that knows no conqueror—God's love. Listen closer for that still, small voice to speak to you. That voice will rise above the din of doubt and you will hear a different message: "You are enough!" Set aside your fears and misgivings. God knows your resilience and your strength because He Himself has planted it in you. There is nothing that you cannot face with Him by your side. Together, you are enough.

Prayerfully Yours,

[Pastor, First Lady or Minister's Name]

EMAIL #4

Subject: "I thought I was in control"

Dear [Congregant],

When life takes an unexpected turn, we often struggle to make sense of it. We ask, "How did this happen? This wasn't how I planned it. I thought I was in control." [Insert personal story about understanding change and control]. No matter how many times we retrace each step, or think through every turn of event, we may not find the answers we are looking for. The true answer is that we were never in control in the first place; God was and always is the one in the driver's street. So, when it seems as though life isn't going as you had planned, lean back on your faith and know that God always has a plan. Your church family is here to walk with you on this journey and to help you discover God's plan for you.

Prayerfully Yours,

[Pastor, First Lady or Minister's Name]

EMAIL #5

Subject: Self Care

Dear [Congregant],

Every day, you are giving away a piece of yourself to strengthen and support a loved one in need. This beautiful labor of love can take its toll physically, emotionally and spiritually. As a caregiver, you regularly put your needs aside to make your ill or older loved one your first priority. Although God is the source of your strength that does not mean that you are eternal. We all must take time to replenish and rejuvenate our bodies, minds and spirits. Whether it is taking a walk in the fresh air, eating lunch with a good friend or saying a silent prayer of thanks in a doctor's office waiting room, remember to replenish and care for yourself so that you can better care for others. We are extraordinary creations of God. Nevertheless, to be as God intended us we must make room for prayer, laughter and joy to nourish our souls; healthy sustenance to nurture our bodies; and, rest. Only then are we prepared to do the Lord's work.

> CAREGIVING MEANS GIVING EVERYTHING YOU HAVE AND **STILL WANTING** TO DO MORE.

Prayerfully Yours,

[Pastor, First Lady or Minister's Name]

EMAIL # 6

Subject: A Moment for God

These days, time feels like a scarce commodity. When caring for an ill or older loved one, it may feel as though there just aren't enough hours in the day. You rise before the sun and go to sleep long after its departure. In between, there are doctor's appointments, bills to pay, prescriptions to pick up, meals to prepare—the list goes on. Who has time for prayer and meditation with a schedule as busy as yours? No matter where we are in the day—sitting at a red light, standing in line at the grocery store—God is there, and He is listening, waiting for you to speak to Him. As faithful members of God's church family we know that He is in our hearts at every moment. Because He is always with us, we always have time to pray. Speak to Him in your heart, give Him thanks, ask for His strength and guidance, commune with Him and you will see His love. Pray, and know that your family at [Name of Church] and I are praying with you.

Prayerfully Yours,

[Pastor, First Lady or Minister's Name]

4

Text Messages and Tweets of Hope

Text Messages and Tweets of Hope are short messages that you can send to family caregivers twice a month. These inspirational messages will help caregivers deal with stress and perhaps improve their perspectives on their circumstances. You can post these on your church's Twitter account and send by cell phone texting. Feel free to modify these messages as needed. Text messages can be sent in bulk through services such as **www.trumpia.com** and **www.BulkSMS.com**. Sample text messages and tweets follow.

Theme: Godly Love

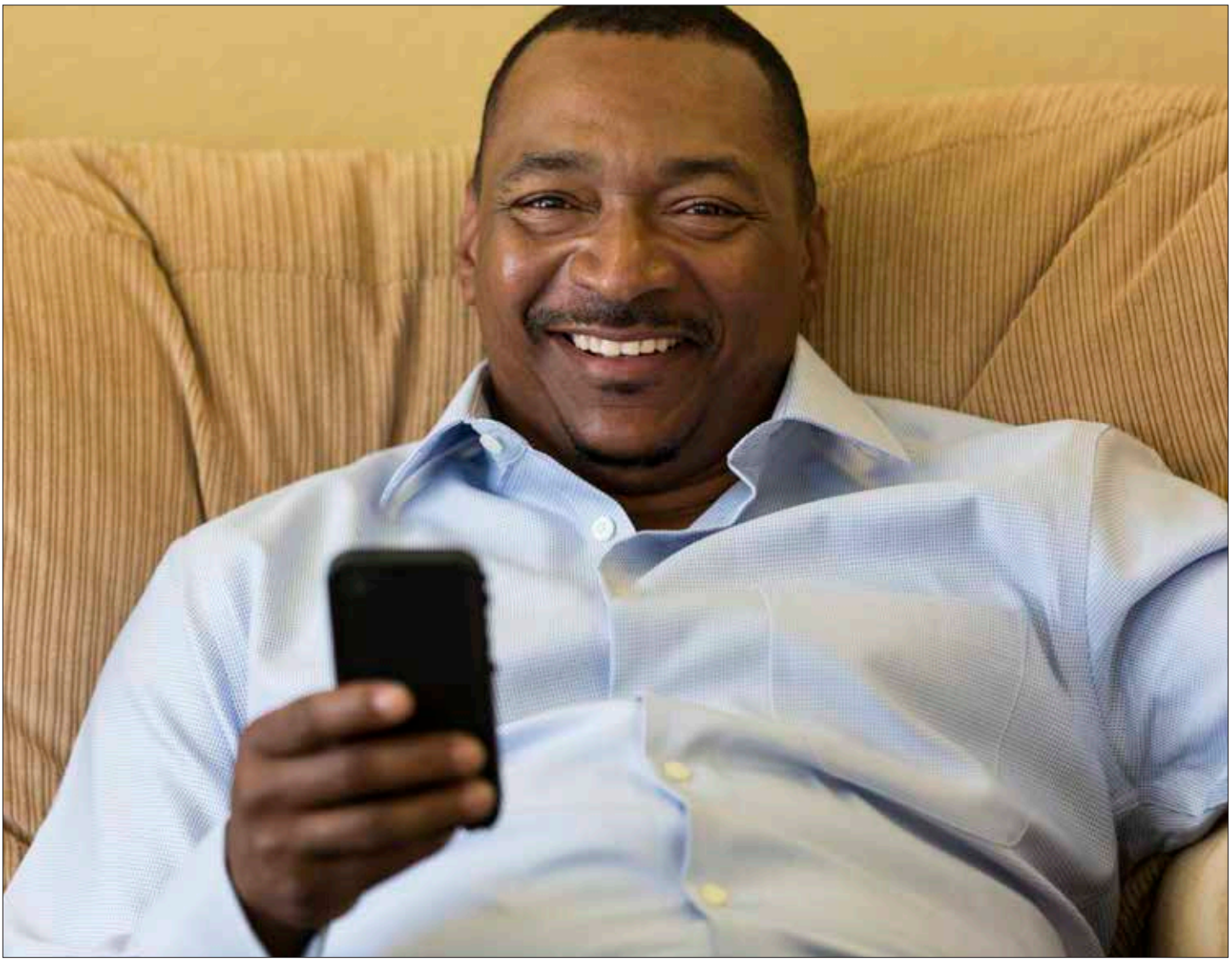
1. Let God's love work through you as you care for your loved one.
2. In times of need, let gratitude for God's love fill you up.

Theme: Help Us Help You

3. Call on your church family for support. We are here to help!
4. Let [Name of Church] ease the burden on your shoulders. Call us today!

Theme: Self-Care

5. Give to yourself so that you can give of yourself. Replenish your mind, body and spirit.
6. Seek prayer and laughter to nourish your soul, rest and healthy sustenance to nurture your body, wholeness—as God intended.



Theme: Prayer – A Moment for God

7. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, God is with you—speak to Him. He is waiting for your call.
8. You may be busy, but God always has time to talk!

Theme: Resources – Who Is in My Corner?

9. Everyone is relying on you, but you can rely on us. Find out how [Name of Church] can help.
10. [Name of Church] is in your corner. Let us lighten your load as you care for your loved one.

5

Telephone Inspirational Messages

Telephone Inspirational Messages are pre-recorded telephone messages that you can send to members monthly. Preferably, have the Pastor, First Lady or a Minister record the messages. Feel free to modify them as needed. You may also want to include updates about church activities. There are several telephone broadcasting companies you can use to communicate your care and concern for family caregivers. Some free options to deliver your message to multiple caregivers include **www.phonevite.com** or **www.voice2phone.com**. Sample telephone messages follow:

Church Anniversary – During the month of our church's [number] anniversary, we remember the strength of our church community. It is not simply the brick and mortar that have held our church together throughout the years, but also our unity as a family in faith and our shared devotion to God. Your church family is praying for you, today and always.

Pastor's Anniversary – As we celebrate Pastor [Name]'s [number] anniversary with our congregation, we are reminded of the shepherd vigilantly watching over his flock. This month remember that God has blessed us with Pastor [Name], who has counseled each of us through many caregiving twists and turns. As family caregivers, we take the time to lift up the Pastor in prayer.

February (Valentine's Day) – Simply set foot into any store and you will find yourself in a sea of candy hearts, red roses and greeting cards. As a caregiver for an ill or older loved one, you know that love is not just reserved for a single day—it appears in our thoughts and actions every single day, and God's love is everlasting. Let His love surround you, today and always. Happy Valentine's Day, your church family sends its love.

May (Older Americans Month) – As a caregiver you may spend a lot of time with an older loved one. This May, celebrate Older Americans Month in thoughtful reflection about the loving care you have provided for someone who has already given so much. God sees your compassion, devotion and inner strength and is smiling upon you.

August (Vacations) – When caring for an ill or older loved one, vacation time can be hard to come by. Take a few moments each day to close your eyes, breathe deeply and imagine yourself on a peaceful shore. The sun is shining on your face, a warm breeze touches your skin, the sand is soft beneath your feet and the water is clear and cool. Sometimes a mini mental vacation can go a long way.

November (National Family Caregivers Month) – November is National Family Caregivers Month and your family at [Name of Church] would like to let you know that we support and value you, especially now as you care for your loved one. Call on your church family today for practical resources and spiritual encouragement.

December (Christmas) – Merry Christmas! [Name of Church] would like to wish you a wonderful day and holiday season. And, we want to thank you. You truly give the gift of caring to your loved one. May this be a peaceful and glorious season for you and your family.

AARP Family Caregiving™

Program brought to you through a partnership of AARP Foundation and AARP Multicultural Leadership.

Written by Angela Heath and Linda Barbarotta.

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