

Practical and Pastoral Responses to Caregiving

Information and research carried out by Carers UK paints the startling reality of carers in the UK and Ireland. As you read around these statistics, consider your own corps and centres, and how many of these carers will be sitting in your congregations. But also keep in mind those who may be isolated and not engaging with people outside of their four walls.

- Carers UK says that 'the most recent 2021 Census puts the estimated number of unpaid carers at 5 million in England and Wales'. This, together with ONS Census data for Scotland and Northern Ireland, suggests that the number of unpaid carers across the UK is 5.7 million.
- This means that around 9 per cent of people are providing unpaid care. However, Carers UK research in 2022 estimates the number of unpaid carers could be as high as 10.6 million (Carers UK, Carers Week 2022 research report).
 - 4.7 per cent of the population in England and Wales are providing 20 hours or more of care a week.
 - Over the period of 2010-2020, every year 4.3 million people became unpaid carers, which is approximately 12,000 people a day (Petrillo and Bennett, 2022).
 - 59 per cent of unpaid carers are women (Census 2021). Women are more likely to become carers and to provide more hours of unpaid care than men. More women than men provide high-intensity care at ages when they would expect to be in paid work (Petrillo and Bennett, 2022).
 - One in seven people in the workplace in the UK are juggling work and care (Carers UK, Juggling Work and Care, 2019).



(Source: www.carersuk.org/policy-and-research/key-facts-and-figures/)

What does this mean to us as the Church and our practical and pastoral response to those who are care-givers in our communities? Firstly, perhaps we start with what we know. We know that there will be carers in our communities, which means we know that there will be people who need support, who need a listening ear and who need to be understood, and those who are their responsibilities to be understood too.

We need to remember in our pastoral care of carers that caring can have a significant impact on their own personal health and wellbeing. 60 per cent of carers report a long-term health condition or disability, compared to 50 per cent of non-carers (Carers UK analysis of GP Patient Survey 2021).

Carers do share how they often feel isolated and lonely, and statistics prove that those within minority groups feel lonelier as carers than those who are not within these minority groups (Black, Asian, LGBTQ+, those living with a disability and other minority groups – Care UK).

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Caregivers come in many different forms. They may be someone who is a full-time carer within their own home, perhaps someone who has responsibility for the care of a loved one in a care home/facility, or a person who is caring from a distance trying to ensure that 'care' is put in place for another person. Everyone will feel differently about becoming a carer for another person, and we have to remember the unique value and worth of every individual, acknowledging their individual thoughts, feelings and responses.

Some may feel guilt for needing a break, and some will feel a burden of responsibility. Carers can be young, caring for older family members; some may be sandwiched between caring for their own children and for their parents at the same time; and some carers will be older people who should really be cared for themselves. The pastoral carer's responsibility, therefore, is to be aware of the different background situations, and to work with others to support carers in a variety of ways as and when needed.

Therefore, what simple steps can we take to ensure that carers themselves receive Christian loving care and compassion?

Pastoral Ideas:

Send a card – Let the caregiver know that they are not forgotten, reminding them that there is a church family who wants to give support in whatever way is possible.

Make a phone call – Let the caregiver hear another's voice. Ask how they are doing, not just the person they are caring for. Let them know that you are listening and want to know their concerns and their joys. Offer to pray for carers over the phone.



Offer respite – If appropriate, set up a buddying scheme so that the carer can have some time out, even if it's one hour a week. Is there a group (with safeguarding and risk assessments in place) that can make a rota to go and sit with the person who is being cared for whilst the carer has one or two hours to themselves? Perhaps two people at a time might be helpful, depending on the person's needs.

Carers Group – Set up a carers group where people can come with their loved ones and create a 'community of carers' to support one another emotionally and spiritually. The feeling that you are understood by someone in a similar position can be very helpful for caregivers.



Practical Ideas:

Signpost carers to the National Carer Card and app which supports those who are caregivers. To clarify, this card is for anyone that cares for someone who needs help and support.

It provides reassurance for carers by including their emergency contact details (ICE), whilst unlocking discounts, a Wellbeing Hub, a Carer Circle tool, and more.

www.carerscarduk.co.uk

Walking – Suggest a walk with a carer, which is a free activity. Even just ten minutes outside in the fresh air can help a person's physical health and wellbeing.

Gentle exercise – If someone is spending a lot of time indoors or is mentally focused on their loved one, exercise may be the last thing they think of doing for themselves. An OPM resource called Momentum Movement to Music is based on gentle movements and can be used with carers and those that are cared for.

www.salvationist.org.uk/resources/discipleship/momentum-movement-music

Offer practical help - With the carer's permission, create a rota to provide a prepared meal, or even offer to go and do chores such as washing up and laundry once a week. Can your community help with shopping, providing transport to appointments or gardening? Think about all the things that you need to do in your own home, and then think about how much time and energy the carer will have to spend on top of caring for their loved one. Simple help may make a huge difference and allows people to physically see the carer at the same time.

The Carers Trust – Signpost caregivers to The Carers Trust network which is the largest network of organisations supporting the wellbeing of unpaid carers. The Carers Trust can also on occasion provide financial support with grants and funding to unpaid carers.

Carer's Assessment – Support carers with completing the Local Authority Carer's Assessment which determines what type of care and how much care a carer is giving, and what help and support may be available to them. Support can include sending someone else to come in and care while the carer takes a break, gym memberships, financial support towards taxis for carers who do not drive, other possible benefits and local support groups. For further information visit:

www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/practical-support/carers-assessment/

Acknowledging that anyone at any time can become a carer reminds us that people's lives can change overnight. Let us never forget those who are caregivers. May we pray for our eyes to be opened to the different types of care someone might be giving and the possible toll this responsibility may be taking on someone's wellbeing. You as the pastoral carer may be the one person who is showing compassion and kindness to a caregiver. So let us walk this path with humility, gentleness and patience.

'Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.'
(Colossians 3:12 NIV)