

Guide to Video Series
Reclaiming Our Baptismal Call
to the
Ministry of Care
and Companionship



“An evangelizing community ...has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of God’s infinite mercy...An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh in others. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be.”
(Pope Francis Evangelium Vitae)

Over the past 30 years, Canadian culture has experienced a major shift from a Judeo-Christian centered value system to a secular, relativistic one dominated by individual rights and choice, and dependent on technology for answers to all life’s issues. One tragic result is that the communal sense of care for the sick and dying and companionship of the lonely and bereaved is no longer the norm. We have come to expect that all the needs of the sick and dying will be provided by professional services and have forgotten that, as disciples of Christ, we are all called to proclaim the Good News, to comfort the afflicted and to heal the sick.

In our diocesan journey toward transformation and renewal over the last few years we have come to a new appreciation that being an evangelizing community requires both words and deeds. The Supreme Court of Canada decision on assisted suicide and euthanasia has provided a new urgency for us to touch “the



suffering flesh in others” and be supportive in the most difficult times. While heralded by many as humane and compassionate care, assisted suicide and euthanasia are, in reality, a rejection of the Paschal Mystery and the medicalization of suffering and of death. It compels us to move out of our comfortable pew to become actively engaged in the lives of people, especially the most vulnerable.

Requests for medically assisted death have little to do with intractable pain or other physical symptoms. Optimal palliative care, still not available for all Canadians, can alleviate almost all physical symptoms. Some of the main reasons for requests are loss of dignity, guilt at being a burden for others, fear of the future and of abandonment, dependence and loss of meaning. These are issues of human suffering. Archbishop Mancini reminds us that,



“As Catholics who believe in the way of the Lord, the response to suffering is to provide care! Christ healed the sick and broken-hearted by being understanding and compassionate. The Christian response to suffering, in keeping with Christ’s actions, is to transform suffering with meaning. When there is no meaning to suffering, it is only pain, and of course people are afraid; they become angry and depressed. But where there is meaning, where there is love and proper care, where there is community support, suffering can become sacrifice! Sacrifice is not just another word for ‘put up with’. It literally means from its Latin root, to make something “sacred.””

Suffering is helped by presence and accompaniment. And so, the Archbishop has challenged us as a community of disciples of Jesus Christ to find ways to witness in a transformative way to His healing and



reconciling ministry today. We are asked to help in developing environments of support and care that provide tangible experiences of God's mercy and lessen the suffering of the sick, chronically ill, frail and dependent elderly, dying and bereaved.

The Ministry of Care and Companionship: A New Vision for the Parish Community

We propose to reclaim the ministry of care and companionship of the whole faith community as a major expression of an evangelizing community. Church teaching on the role of the laity and on the parish as the basic unit of the Church supports this ministry.

Goals for the Halifax Yarmouth Ministry of Care Committee include:

- ◆ accepting the challenges of doing mercy in a response to the sick and suffering.
- ◆ fostering diocesan education in the Catholic tradition of a *Good Death*.
- ◆ increasing awareness of the pain and suffering of the sick, chronically ill, frail and dependent elderly, dying and bereaved within our own parish communities.
- ◆ initiating and supporting a new vision of the ministry of care and companionship in our parish communities.

The Committee has developed a webpage on the Archdiocesan website: www.halifaxarmouth.org/care This site makes accessible prayers for the sick and dying and those who care for them, information on services and outreach support, programs for formation for accompaniment and credible resources on issues of sickness, dying and bereavement.

Regional and central educational programs will be developed in response to needs identified by clergy and local MC&C leaders.



Video Series “Reclaiming Our Baptismal Call to the Ministry of Care and Companionship”

In the introduction to this video series to promote this new ministry, George MacCormack, a committee member, and Sister Nuala Kenny, Chair of the Archdiocesan Committee, discuss their hopes and plans for this ministry. In addition to the suggested questions at the end of each conversation we ask that you keep in mind two broad questions.

1. What have I learned?
2. How can this help meet my parish needs?

Session 1: A New Urgency for Care of the Sick, Suffering and Dying - Conversation between Archbishop Mancini & Sister Nuala

In our first conversation, Archbishop Mancini and Sister/Doctor Nuala Kenny discuss the current social and legal issues surrounding care of the sick and suffering, especially in light of the Supreme Court of Canada decision and legislation on medically assisted death. They reflect on the spiritual and theological issues

inherent in the medicalization of suffering and the rejection of the Paschal Mystery. The Archbishop identifies the urgency of providing real, tangible support from the entire community of faith and the need to renew ministries of care and companionship in parishes and regions.

Some questions for reflection:

1. Is understanding the implications of medically assisted death a relevant issue in your parish and community?
2. Do you have a parish ministry to the sick and suffering?
3. What do you think the Ministry of Care and Companionship might look like in your parish?
4. What resources do you have? What resources would you need?



Session 2: Responding to the Need in Our Midst - Conversation between Margaret-Anne Ashfield & Monica McNamara

In our second conversation, Margaret-Anne Ashfield and Monica McNamara describe the need for this ministry from their experiences in care for the aging, especially in long term care and in care for the dying in hospice and palliative care. Their personal lived experiences of care bring an authenticity to the need for a renewed commitment of care and companionship from followers of Christ.

As you think about the insights shared by Monica and Margaret we ask that you consider the following questions:

1. Can you think of some older people who seem to have disappeared from parish activities? Have you ever asked why or sought them out?
2. Have you had the personal experience of a *good death* of a loved one? What were its characteristics?
3. What has been your experience of hospice or palliative care?



Session 3: Resources and Support for Developing the Gifts of All - Conversation between Dianne Bulger & Joan Tufts

In this final session, Joan Tufts and Dianne Bulger discuss practical ways in which the faith community is trying to respond to the needs for care and companionship. They identify some challenges to motivating and supporting those who volunteer. Dianne will present a specific parish palliative care program which offers training and education, emphasizing the importance of our sharing scarce resources.

At this time we ask that you to consider the following questions.

1. Have you had an experience attending to a family member or friend who was sick or dying?
2. Do you feel that there is a need in your parish to organize an outreach program for the sick and dying?
3. Identify and list some of the key elements you feel are essential in establishing such a ministry?

Conclusion: “Challenges and Opportunities for Mercy and Compassion in Our Parishes and Regions”

- To motivate all to be part of this ministry and provide suitable formation and support for those involved.
- To provide opportunity for smaller parishes to engage with other church communities and local nursing homes to develop a united ministry of care for the sick and the dying.
- To provide opportunities to talk about death and dying in our parishes
- Other?

For the videos and more information visit:

www.halifaxyarmouth.org/care



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