

LOVING THOSE WHO ARE SERIOUSLY ILL

from the Healing Care and Prayer Team
Belmont Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Indiana

- All of us can send cards or notes, or perhaps e-mails, that can be read when there is a good time. Words of love, appreciation, memories, making peace, blessings are all treasures. "The mailbox should always be full and there should always be fresh flowers in the house."
- Limit contacts that require ringing (i.e., a phone or door bell). Anything that requires an immediate response can become taxing in stressful times.
- Check with other support people regarding bringing meals, and before doing some of the following acts of love.
- Invite the ones caring closely for the suffering person to come away for short breaks. Those doing the caretaking are suffering too and need our love and listening.
- Offer just to be present. The suffering person should not need to be alone unless he or she wants to be.
- Consider the gift of music or your recorded voice reading scripture if that would suit the suffering person. Some people like to go in small groups to sing or play music for people who are ill.
- Gently enter into the world of the one suffering. While you can never fully understand, you can seek to share some sense of their experience, needs, and insights.
- Gently offer your world. Share your own life, and your caring response to the suffering of the other as the person has energy to listen.
- Simply share your faith: "You've been in my thoughts and prayers." If it feels right, offer to pray with the person. People who are suffering "feel" the prayers of those who love them, whether the people are near or far away.
- Offer images -- symbolic gifts or words. Picture how God may be near, and share your image or a scripture of care. However, avoid faith interpretations that make light of loss or suffering such as Romans 8:28.
- Don't share advice or stories that compare this person's situation to others. While your own hopes and fears and worries may be triggered by seeing someone else suffering, the one who is ill should not have to carry your anxiety.
- Learn more about the illness, about the healing process, or about the dying process. (For more information, check with Hospice.) There are times when "just being present" is all that is possible, and a great act of love.
- Love, love, love. Your gaze, your care, your handshake or embrace all speak volumes of love. You don't need a lot of words. Each situation is different. Be willing to keep learning how the ones you love need your love in hard times.
- We live and die in faith. While entering death is entering the unknown, and letting go of the ones we love causes grief, yet we enter it in hope of a new life in Christ with God.