

**A CARING COMMUNITY  
PASTORAL CARE TASK FORCE  
SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2009**

**Blessing:**

Goddess (Creator, Spirit of Life), give us a heart for simple things  
Love and laughter  
Bread and wine  
Tales and dreams  
Fill our lives with green and growing hope  
Make us a people of justice  
Whose song is halleluiah and who's name breeds love.

**I Am Here  
Nancy Gaylor**

There are so many different life situations, each with it's own gifts and challenges. And each one impacts our ability to engage with our religious community - our sacred home. We may see ourselves in one right now, but in the dance of life, we may have already experienced others and know that we may yet experience more in the future. Please listen for yourself and for others that you recognize in each life situation.

I am here new  
.. in this place of worship  
So many people engaged with one another  
Talking, laughing  
yet ..... I stand alone  
waiting, wondering, hoping  
Do I belong?  
Will I be noticed?

I've been here for a while  
- feeling settled  
Know my way around - Know a few people.  
But I'm not connected,  
not sure of the next step.  
What do I do now - who do I go to?

I am here involved  
I feel good about my part  
Great committee - good to be connected  
..... to work on things that matter to me  
But I wonder what would happen if I didn't do these things  
..... or couldn't anymore ..... or burned out  
Am I just a body to do the work?  
Does anyone really notice ME?

I am here thriving  
Wow what a great service - awesome music!  
Need some coffee  
Jen, the meeting has been changed to Tuesday. Can you make it?  
Do you need me to bring the notes from yesterday?  
Have you seen Harry?  
Got to let him know about a problem before I head out.  
I need him to take care of this one for me - my week is too heavy!  
There's someone standing alone - hope somebody talks to him. Where's membership?  
I'm late. Gotta go find Harry. See you Tuesday!

I am here disconnected  
Have been coming for a long time  
There are so many new people  
I don't see anyone I know anymore.  
So many conversations  
I stand on the fringe,  
But I'm not part of them  
Does anyone notice me?

I am here at home struggling  
Overwhelmed with life's problems  
Sick, lonely, afraid .....too tired  
Can't go to church  
Afraid to break down  
Can't be in the crowd,  
Even though I need it now more than ever.  
It was so different when I was well  
Has anyone even noticed that I'm not there?

I am here in my old age  
At home alone ... so alone  
And can no longer go to church  
To the sacred space that filled my deepest needs, for all those years  
Where I gave so much of myself and was enriched in return.  
I've heard that it is busy there  
..... That there is lots happening  
The newsletter keeps getting longer .....

Do I belong anymore?  
Will anyone even notice that I'm not there?

At the core for each of us, is the need to be known. Living in community means that we are part of a larger whole. But we need to experience being known as an individual and also simply as the person who we are - aside from our life stage or personal or organizational roles. We need to know that someone in our community knows what is happening in our life and stays in touch whether times are good or bad or in between.

When Alicia was here she suggested that we 'look out' for one another by posting a page on the wall for one person to 'notice' 10 people on their list. In our survey last summer, being known was the most frequently identified aspect of caring. Thus we are committed to building a Care Network, to know every person in our congregation.

You are invited to become part of this network - to be a person who knows a small group of people and keeps in touch with them primarily by phone, connecting them to other resources in our congregation as needed. No experience required, only a commitment to stay connected with a few people - and a wonderful opportunity to care and to live out our Unitarian Universalist values.

Noticing, connecting, networking, knowing, caring. Whatever word you use, through a deliberate network we will notice everyone - and keep them in our circle of care, so that our final phrases may be:

I am here - whatever my place on my journey  
new, settled, involved, thriving, disconnected, struggling, elderly.

They called me last week  
Just to touch base  
How are you? What's new?  
Me... the person  
Who was, is and will be  
A part of this sacred community

Because I belong  
..... I am noticed.

## **Casserole Ministry**

### **Michelle Corbeil**

Anyone who has been near me in the past 2-3 weeks has listened patiently to my angst about a number of things going on in my life, caring for several important people, the start up of a new planning, training and coordinating cycle in my work with student leaders at Mac, and a number of projects on the go at church and elsewhere. Inevitably the conversation has turned to today's topic and the exchange has sounded something like this

...

I'm working on a short piece for a church service and I'm talking about the new casserole ministry we are starting – for 6 minutes. How in the world am I going to talk about the casserole ministry for 6 minutes?

A what?

A casserole ministry.

What's that....?

On one level this is an easy question to answer. The casserole ministry is one of three programs emerging from the work of the Pastoral Care Task Force that we are launching this spring. We learned, from consulting with you, that the casserole ministry is of value to our community and something we can do.

People come to church for a reason and we have the capacity to show we care - the casserole ministry is a tangible way to say "I care about you".

We know that the sharing of food/meals with one another happens informally and often in this community, and it happens especially well when you are well known/been around for a long time and you are well connected through small group ministry, committee work, social justice projects, friendships, choir to name a few.

We see this informal practice of "feeding each other" becoming a more structured program that is available to everyone for whom a casserole or a bowl of soup would be welcomed because, as Connie Kaldor writes 'when hard times fall like rain...that's when you understand all of us at sometime need a helping hand".

When we live our faith in relationship to one another with kindness and generosity, it is both a gift to the other and it is a transformative experience for us and for our community.

Years ago, long before I became a member and before I knew anyone's name, I remember the feeling of wanting to help – of wanting to reach out by making a meal – when there was a call for food and childcare for a fellow congregant, a sole support parent with small children, facing a life threatening illness who also had no immediate or extended family in Hamilton.

My heart went out to this family and I immediately thought, "I can easily make a batch of chili or something". I approached the contact person following the service, offering to make meals and help in other ways that were needed. The response from this community was overwhelming, so overwhelming in fact that I learned later than many expressions of assistance were not needed.

I remember thinking...wow, what a community...I want in...I want to be part of a community that calls on each other to care for one another in this way.

This reminded me of an old fable about a man who was given the opportunity to visit both heaven and hell. The first place he saw was hell. He was taken to a large banquet table where hundreds of starving people were sitting. The table was loaded with mouth-watering food and yet the souls who sat there were starving. The visitor noted that each person had a long-handled spoon chained to his or her wrist. The handles were so long that whenever they tried to feed themselves, the food spilled on the table. The frustrated and angry faces of the people made it clear that they were truly suffering.

Then, the visitor asked to see heaven. Although he was feeling very depressed by what he had just seen in hell, he was shown another long banquet table. The souls also had long-handled spoons chained to their wrists, but there were hundreds of well-fed, happy people.

The difference, he quickly noted, was that the people in heaven were using the long-handled spoons to feed each other.

To be on the receiving end of a friend/congregants kindness and generosity can be indescribable especially when a meal arrives, unexpectedly, when dinner might have been a head of cauliflower with cheese, a bag of smart popcorn or a little of this and a little of that.

I imagine the casserole ministry working it's magic by –

strengthening the connections between us as we gather in our homes to make chili, stews, soups and casseroles to stock the freezer,

creating new connections between us as we enjoy a meal prepared by someone we are just getting to know

swapping our recipes and meal hour blessings

and

building a strong and healthy community one casserole at a time

A number of people have been working behind the scenes to get our casserole ministry up and running – Glen/Catherine McPerhson Doe / Don McFadyen generously donated the freezer in Fellowship Hall, Ann Craig Howarth and Mary Beech will Coordinate this ministry, working with Barb Kulcher to work through the logistics and finer details of implementation. And Pat Keefe has offered to deliver casseroles to those unable to get to church

And then there is you...what can you do to build community one casserole at a time?

Following today's service, you are invited to take a plastic container home with you and return it next week with something you have made. The freezer will be open between 10 – 10:20 a.m., just prior to the Service next week.

Thank you.

## **Spiritual Care & The Practice of Presence**

### **Don McFadyen**

*For those of us who would offer pastoral or spiritual care we must learn that spiritual care requires the practice of presence. I begin with a quote from Sharyl B. Peterson's 'The Indispensable Guide to Pastoral Care:' "Perhaps the greatest blessing we can offer one another is that of authentic presence, which means being as completely there with the other person as you are able. It is not about knowing exactly the right thing to say or do. It is not about knowing more than the other about what they need, nor about fixing them or their situation. It is about being in the moment with them. This can be hard to accept because most of us caregivers want to know what we can do to help others. Yet what caregivers most need to learn is simply how to be – with and for others."*

*Spiritual care then is about realizing that we are helping by simply being there. It is not about knowing more than the other about what they need. It is not about fixing them or their situation. It is about realizing that the attitudes of 'knowing more' and 'fixing' are the very things that create an unsafe place. It is about realizing that we are helping in the only way we can, at that moment, by being in relationship with them, by being in the moment with them and by offering our self to be with their self. This type of caring requires both presence in the person of the carer and presence in the carer's responses to the person cared for.*

*To achieve this presence in the person of the carer, this 'being there' type of response, requires full awareness of oneself on the part of the carer. The carer is seeking to be more than he or she normally is. This is expressed by how the carer listens. And how do we normally listen? We rehearse what we are going to say when the other person finally stops talking. We attach negative evaluations to what the other person is saying. We change the subject when it becomes too personal or threatening. We give advice, assuming that the other person wants us to find a solution for their problem. We rush to reassure them that everything will be alright. In short, we do not normally listen. We never really hear what the other person is telling us. We don't give them a safe place to fully express their thoughts, let alone their feelings. We are listening with our 'reactive minds,' our analytical, judgmental minds. How could we help but think that our advice is wanted. And yet it is our very advice that will shut down the vital process of 'being there.'*

*To listen in a caring manner, we need to detach ourselves from our reactive mind and access our 'wise mind.' The wise mind is beyond the world of evaluation and comparison. The wise mind is able to recognize mental events without becoming attached to them. Do I find myself judging what the other is saying? Do I find myself wanting to argue with what the other is saying? Well, the wise mind can observe these antics without getting caught up in them. Think of wise mind as the "me" in the relational frame of "me and my mind." It is the place where we can be separate from the pull of the reactive mind's rules about how to behave. It is the place where we can experience the world directly through our senses, our intuition and our hearts. Wise mind brings us into present moment awareness which is precisely where we want to be in order to listen with empathy and compassion. And so, the carer becomes more than he or she normally is and able to provide a safe place for the other.*

*Now let's look at presence in the carer's response to the person cared for. Presence is also expressed in the response that the carer offers to the one being cared for. How does one listen? And what does one listen for? In the pastoral care workshop last fall we learned how to listen. We send 'paying attention' signals to both ourselves and to the other through body language, eye contact and encouraging vocalizations. We repeat back the gist of what the other says. We convey educated guesses about what the other is feeling. We ask questions to clarify as necessary. But what are we listening for? We are listening for information about their present situation. The carer wants to understand as much as he or she can about the immediate challenge to this person's life. A tool which I find useful in this regard is the Awareness Wheel. The Awareness Wheel reminds us that every experience has five components: sensations, interpretations, feelings, intentions and actions.*

*So, when the person being cared for is telling us about their situation, we can keep our listening focused on their experience by asking ourselves a series of questions. What did the other person actually see and hear? What are the facts of the situation? What story is the other telling themselves about the facts? What judgments are being made? What expectations have been disappointed? What assumptions have been proven wrong? What is the person feeling? Do they feel mad, sad, glad, or scared? What is the other hoping for in this situation? What options have they considered? What actions have already been taken, remembering that avoidance and withdrawal are also actions. If we do all this we will be listening for understanding, we will be truly walking in the other person's shoes.*

*Finally, by just 'being there' we will be affirming the sacredness of the other. By being in loving, caring relationship with the other person we will be affirming that they are more than their present situation. We are all created for relationship. We rediscover ourselves and our power to live and change in the context of relationship. Spiritual care is about the relationship provided and the restoring of soul than can result from that.*

So be it!