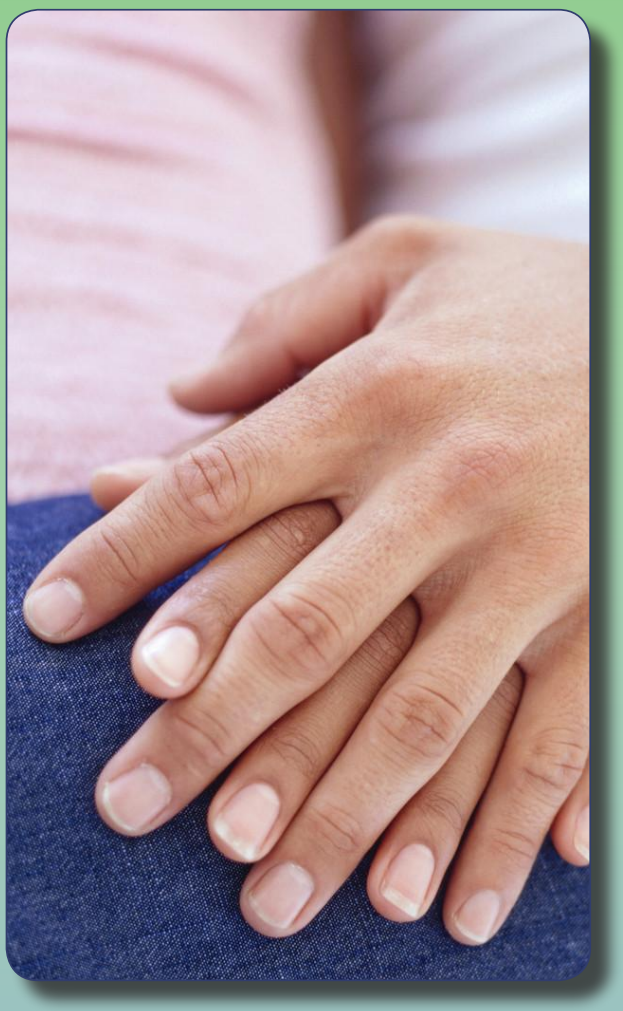

Love cures people...
both the ones who **give** it and the
ones who **receive** it.

Dr. Karl Menninger

Providing Support

To Loved Ones Facing Cancer and Other Challenges

The Lutheran Church of
ST. ANDREW
15300 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20905

God Gives Us Talents and Gifts to Help

Hearing a diagnosis of a cancer or any life-threatening disease has a profound affect on your loved one's world. Life for your loved one is focused on the medical situation and he or she uses all available energies to do what's needed to cope and heal. You as a family member, friend, spiritual advisor, co-worker, or colleague may find yourself asking the same questions: *What is it that I can do? How can I give of myself in a way that gives goodness to my loved one? Where is my part in my loved one's recovery?*

God has given each of us unique talents – our own personal greatest gifts that are blessings to your loved one. Each of us has been gifted with talents ready to be used, whether it takes the shape of spiritual support, emotional support, social support, encourager, or provider. The purpose of this brochure is to help you gain insight into what you can actively do to provide help and caring so that your loved one knows she is not alone.

Do you see something in the list below that fits your interests or triggers a thought as to how to help? You'll find more suggestions later in this brochure.

I like to create…

- Write notes, send cards, make a prayer shawl, chemotherapy hat, or lap blanket
- Fill a jar with memories, blessings, or prayers
- Scrapbook healing themes

I like to relate to others …

- Listen to your loved one's story, provide encouragement
- Plan an outing
- Call routinely to check-in
- Visit to watch a movie, read a story aloud, listen, pray
- Give lots of hugs
- Give emotional support to boost his or her sense of self-worth and feeling loved, cared for and understood

I like to get things going…

- Organize a network of care givers to provide meals, house cleaning, grocery shopping, or laundry
- Send out a request for a shower of cards, organize drivers to appointments
- Collect donations for gift cards, cleaning services, or meals

I like to be practical, methodical, efficient and orderly…

- Clean the house or do the gardening
- Drive to medical appointments, cook a meal, take care of the children
- Do the grocery shopping, do laundry, water the plants
- Screen calls
- Help with paperwork such as insurance claims, care for pets, car pool

I like to figure things out…

- Look up information such as medical trends, clinical trials, medical coverage, patient support services
- Provide information, hope and advice about treatment options
- Help with paperwork such as insurance claims

Spiritual Support

"And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."
James 5:15-16 (NIV)

The early weeks after diagnosis is filled with anxiety and fear so if your loved one doesn't think, want, or have the energy to pray, tell him not to worry because friends and family have that covered. God knows how hard his journey is and He will never leave him. He will provide all that is needed according to His plan for him. In time, he will be talking to God throughout the day and will feel His peace.

A prayer when you pray together:

Lord, look upon my loved one with eyes of mercy, may your healing hand rest upon her, may your life-giving powers flow into every cell of her body and into the depths of her soul, cleansing, purifying, restoring her to wholeness and strength for service in your Kingdom. Give her courage to live with her disease. Help her to face and overcome her fears. Be with her when she is alone or rejected. Comfort her when she is discouraged. And touch her with your healing Spirit that she may find and possess eternal life, now and forever. Amen.

A private prayer:

You know my loved one so much better than I do. You know his sickness and the burden he carries. You also know his heart. Lord, I ask you to be with my friend now, and work in his life. Lord, let your will be done in my friend's life. Lord, I pray for my friend because your Word says I should pray for his healing. I believe you hear this earnest prayer from my heart and that it is powerful because of your promise. I have faith in you to heal my friend, but I also trust in the plan you have for his life. Lord, I don't always understand your ways. I don't know why my friend has to suffer, but I trust you. I ask that you look with mercy and grace toward my friend. Nourish his spirit and soul in this time of suffering and comfort him with your presence. Let my friend know you are there with him through this difficulty. And may you be glorified in his life and also in mine. Amen.

This is new to me! What should I say?

You can show interest and concern. You can express encouragement, or you can offer support. Be sensitive to her needs and recognize that this is not an opportunity to satisfy your personal need to help. And sometimes just listening is the most helpful thing you can do. You might say:

- *I'm not sure what to say. But I want you to know I care.*
- *I'm sorry to hear that you are going through this.*
- *If you would like to talk about it, I am here.*

Have patience with your loved one while she is getting treatments and try to move at her pace. It's an emotional roller coaster and she will need to complete the ride. No false cheering and don't discount her feelings. It's a very scary time.

You can remind her that what she is feeling is OK and not to worry if she isn't feeling her same cheery optimistic self. It's a process and time is needed to grieve, get mad, and feel sad. After she finds her emotional balance, she will start looking forward beyond cancer. Listed are possible reactions to the cancer journey that you may see her display.

- First, after hearing the diagnosis, she will have the "deer in the head lights" (shocked) look.
- Shock will be replaced by wanting to learn all the details about her cancer, essentially becoming a partner with her doctor(s).
- Next, fear that every lump or pain is the cancer returning usually follows the end of treatment when routine follow-up doctor visits end.
- Eventually she will find that she can live with her cancer experience and will come to understand that she is living beyond cancer.

Peace begins with a smile.
--Mother Theresa

What more can I do?

How do you overcome feeling uncomfortable?

Ask how you can help. Do not be ashamed of your own fears or discomfort. Be honest with him about how you feel. You might find that talking about it is easier than you think. Feeling sorry for him or feeling guilty for being healthy yourself are normal responses. But, by turning those feelings into offerings of support you make your feelings useful. Asking how you can help can take away some of the awkwardness.

It is important not to discount the very real fears, concerns, or sad feelings your loved one may have.

While it is good to be encouraging, it is also important not to show false optimism or to tell her always have a positive attitude. Doing these things might seem to discount her very real fears, concerns, or sad feelings.

It is also tempting to say that you know how the person feels. While you may know this is a trying time, no one can know exactly how any person with cancer feels.

In what ways might I support a friend or loved one who has cancer?

The most important thing you can do is to mention the situation in some way that feels comfortable for you. You can show interest and concern, you can express encouragement, or you can offer support. Sometimes the simplest expressions of concern are the most meaningful. And sometimes just listening is the most helpful thing you can do.

You can listen if the he wants to talk, acknowledge that you are not sure what to say or do, offer to drive to treatments, grocery shop, rent a movie, fix a meal, etc. You can also:

- Check in weekly for a short chat, if he is up to talking. Sometimes just leaving a message on voice

mail saying "thinking of you ... no need to call back" can be very supportive.

- Consider staying in contact after treatments have ended because she may continue to feel emotional "side-effects". For your loved one, thoughts and fears about cancer do not end when treatments end.

- Send little gifts along the away, e.g. night cap, book, flowers, movie, poems, book mark, CD, etc.
- If she is on a chemotherapy routine, send a card so that it arrives on chemotherapy day. Send a prayer e-mail the day before chemotherapy or when she is ready for humor, send a silly card.
- Send a gift certificate to a restaurant or store for something fun. Target now sells greeting cards with a Starbucks gift card inside.
- Give an uplifting book. An example would be "My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging" by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D. Avoid giving "cancer" books.
- Plan a quiet visit when he is ready, read aloud stories during the treatments, watch a movie or share a meal together, etc.
- Arrange lunch when she is feeling well.
- Shopping therapy appeals to some people. Others want, prefer, or need talk therapy … just let her talk … repeat … talk … repeat … until all the fear and uncertainty is out. Your role is to listen … listen … listen!
- Social support may be as informal as the sympathetic ear of a close friend, or as formal as a survivors' support group or going to see a therapist.
- Consider using a web site to keep your family and friends up-to-date on your loved one's health challenges. Caringbridges is an example of a web site that is free, personal and private and the web

address is www. Caringbridges. org.

When the time is appropriate...

- Encourage him to ask the doctor for help when side effects start. Now is not the time to be strong ... chemotherapy is stronger. It's better to protect the body than to try to be brave and suffer.
- Encourage drinking lots of water ... water ... water!!! Encourage walking and some type of easy exercise. Encourage working for a few hours to feel useful and connected to something familiar.
- Encourage consideration of complementary therapies such

as diet, massage, acupuncture, etc. A helpful book on this topic is "Healing Outside the Margins: The Survivor's Guide to Integrative Cancer Care" by Carole O'Toole and Carolyn B. Hendricks.

- Encourage seeing a nutritionist who can suggest foods that will replace important body chemicals that the chemotherapy has destroyed.
- If she is depressed (which will happen) and it continues for an extended period of time, encourage her to talk with a therapist. A trained therapist can help her mourn the loss and learn how to cope with the uncertainty.

When is use of humor to cheer your loved one appropriate?

Using humor can be an important way of coping with cancer. It can also be another approach to support and encouragement; however, let your loved one take the lead. It is healthy if he finds something funny about a side effect, like hair loss or increased appetite, and then you can certainly join in on a good laugh. This can be a great way to relieve stress and to take a break from the more serious nature of the situation.

But you never want to joke unless you know the person with cancer can handle it and appreciate the humor. Take your lead from your loved one.

When your loved one looks good, let him or her know!

It is very likely that your loved one is acutely aware of how she looks, and may

feel embarrassed if people comment on it. Avoid making comments when her appearance is not so good, such as "You're looking pale," or "You've lost weight."

Is it OK to let your loved one know that you are familiar with cancer?

It's OK to mention that you are familiar with cancer because you have been through it personally or with someone else. Then let him pick up the conversation from there. Everyone is different, and sharing these stories may not be helpful unless solicited by the person or presented in a support group. And remember, the conversation is about your loved one and not about you!

My wife has breast cancer. What can I do to help her?

It can be overwhelming and frustrating when a husband, fiancé, or boyfriend first hears that his loved one has cancer. The initial reaction is often to "fix it" and of course that can not happen. There are a couple resources open to men. The first is a book titled "Breast Cancer Husband" by Marc Silver. The second resource is an organization called "Men Against Breast Cancer". Both resources can educate and provide targeted support to be effective caregivers to the woman he loves.

Respecting privacy is very important

You should never tell anyone else about your loved one's condition unless he has given you permission. Let him be the one to tell others about having cancer. If someone else asks you about it, you can say something like, "It's not up to me to discuss this, but I'm sure Ann will appreciate your concern. I'll let her know you asked about her."

How can I help my loved one cope with a terminal illness?

Because each situation is so uniquely different, talk to a member of her medical team or to a hospice representatives for guidance on how best to provide loving care.

Understanding Your Loved One's Perspective

After hearing the diagnosis, there often is an overwhelming feeling that control over life has been lost. It may take some time or a little effort before your loved one realizes that he still has control. He or she is in control when making decisions about who will be part of the medical team, treatments to take, nutrition and exercise, help that he accepts, quality of life issues, etc.

With the diagnosis of cancer, your loved one begins a journey. It's a journey that encompasses medical treatments and processes, recovery, and a return to living a life with hope and possibilities. To understand how her world has been impacted it may be helpful to view the situation in terms of phases as illustrated using a house analogy.

The process to reclaim her life takes time … maybe months and years, so be patient. Be aware the your loved one may feel the need to be strong for you, so it's important for her to know that she doesn't need to pretend that everything is OK. And it's OK to talk about how this situation is new to you too, and that you are not sure what to say or do. Ask what it is needed from you. The resources on the following page may help.

Above all, pray often that God will open your heart and mind to give guidance and support in whatever way is the best for this unique person and situation, according to His perfect will. Remember that, beyond anything else we can offer, seeking the Spirit through prayer always changes things for the good!

First Phase

Life has been consumed by thoughts of cancer

Her world, i.e. the entire house, is focused on cancer

Second Phase

Treatments are completed and she is afraid that the cancer has returned

Cancer's influence in her life is now confined in a room of the house

Third Phase

Time has passed, cancer has not returned; something triggers a memory

Thoughts of cancer have moved to a box in a room in the house

Fourth Phase

Her cancer experience is a memory

The hold that cancer had on her life has now moved the box to a drawer of a bureau in a room in the house

Sources, Resources and References

ORGANIZATIONS:

American Cancer Society

Information Center – 800/227-2345 or www. cancer.org

- Cancer Survivor Network
- Dietitian on Call
- Look Good … Feel Better
- Man to Man
- Patient Advocate
- Reach/Road for Recovery
- Wigs
- When Someone You Know Has Cancer: Ways to Respond

Komen

www.komen.org

- "What is Social Support?"

BOOKS and ON-LINE RESOURCE:

"Breast Cancer Husband: How to Help Your Wife (and Yourself during Diagnosis, Treatment and Beyond")
by Marc Silver

"Healing Outside the Margins: The Survivor's Guide to Integrative Cancer Care"
by Carole O'Toole and Carolyn B. Hendricks

"My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging"
by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.

"Cure: Caregiver's Corner"
http://www.curetoday.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/magazine.Landing/id/15

SUPPORT GROUPS:

CancerCare

(800) 813-HOPE or www.cancercare.org

Cancer Caregiver Support Group

George Washington University Cancer Center - (202) 741-2218 or www.gwumc.edu

Caregiver Connection

Georgetown Lombardi Cancer Center (202) 444-0109 or http://lombardi.georgetown.edu

Hopewell Cancer Support

410-832-2719 or cancerhelp@hopewellcancersupport.org

Men Against Breast Cancer

www.menagainstbreastcancer.org

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Research and content organized by Sandra Goetsch

Dedicated in loving memory to
Marcella Dawson

A Place For Family And Friends

At all times, and especially at times of illness and distress, a faith community can help! At The Lutheran Church of St Andrew, our mission is to demonstrate God's love by caring for all people, and helping them to know and follow Jesus. Our vision is to be an inclusive and growing reflection of Christ, partnering with our community as servants and leaders to bless people and support their spiritual growth.

Our St Andrew community includes Health & Wellness and Care Ministry Teams, led by our Faith Community Nurse, who is available to offer health-related information, share caregiving resources, and coordinate response to prayer requests and the need for visits, rides, meals and other "care" services to make the journey through illness a bit easier. The "Creative Spirits" Ministry is a part of the Care Team that shares the power of love and prayer through gifts of hand-crafted items of comfort for those facing health crises. Members of the Creative Spirits team, several who are cancer-survivors themselves, coordinated the development of this resource booklet.

St Andrew's team of Pastors, Staff, and Lay Leaders are here to support you! Come worship and fellowship with us! Learn more by visiting our website at www.mystandrew.org or contacting us at:

The Lutheran Church of St Andrew
15300 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20905
301-384-4394 office@mystandrew.org
www.mystandrew.org

May the peace of God and the love of His community surround you and your loved one on the journey to wellness in the weeks and months ahead!

A ministering angel shall my sister be.
--William Shakespeare