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2009

## Care-Giving

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### Repository Citation

Roche, Fr. Randy, "Care-Giving" (2009). *Spiritual Essays*. 138.

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## Care-giving

Most of us care about many persons, including some who have health problems and some who have difficulties associated with ageing. We are caring persons in general, but care-giving most often describes on-going relationships with relatives, friends, or others who have significant needs that they cannot meet themselves and for whom we furnish services that contribute to their quality of life. We want to be caring caregivers, not merely those who act from a sense of guilt or a concern for "what others might think."

There is much more to care-giving than assisting people with physical needs, such as support with basic hygiene and house-cleaning, providing transportation to medical personnel, and doing some or nearly all of the shopping. They also have needs, as do we, for emotional support, and affirmation of personal worth. In addition, we might be challenged as caregivers to encourage those who struggle with physical and emotional needs, but also with anxiety and uncertainty in their relationship with God. We do not have to be a member of the clergy to assist others by hearing and respecting their questions about religion or issues of faith, and giving them our caring acceptance.

But, who will care for the caregivers, and the physical and emotional drain that follows upon intensive care of others? We are affected by whatever we do in any relationship, especially when we intentionally strive to sustain another person in his or her difficulties. Where do we find the resources necessary for ongoing concentration of thought and action on behalf of others while maintaining balance in our lives?

We have friends and perhaps other family members to encourage us. But ultimately, God is the source of all that enables us to act lovingly in the midst of suffering, ours and theirs. We are not asked to trespass our own limits for the sake of others. Staying in the company of God, and intentionally seeking help and healing for our own hurts and challenges, is as important as the practical conduct of our care-giving.

Regular prayer is a means of receiving not just strength to keep going, but consolation that centers us in our own present situation. We are trying to help another person live as best he or she is able, and we cannot give what we do not ourselves have. We need to stay in touch with the source of our own values and our purpose in life, and consciously connect them with our care-giving. If we do not care for

ourselves, and become reflectively aware that we are cared for, we will not be able to sustain care for others.

We will profit much, and so will those for whom we are care-givers, when we exercise proper "selfishness" and take the means that enable us to distinguish between what is ours to do and what is not. Daily prayerful reflection on our experiences, which is not the same as merely thinking, allows us to receive inspirations and helpful information about ourselves which in turn has a positive effect upon the quality of our service for others.

Our care for others is a manifestation of God's care for them, and also an expression of our love that often surprises us when we look back and realize how much, and in what ways, we have grown. Care-giving changes the giver for the better even more than it benefits the receiver.