

Implementation Guide



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THE CARING CONGREGATION MINISTRY

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Chapter One

First Essential: Recruit and Equip

Thank you, Creator God, for gifting your people with compassion and enthusiasm to care for one another. We would ask that you help us encourage one another in this journey, that surely we might offer the ministry of Christlike healing to all who yearn for greater peace, new strength, and grace beyond measure. All this we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

I (Melissa) remember it like it was yesterday. My husband, Bill, was the solo pastor at a small program-sized church in a town of five thousand. I hadn't yet been commissioned as a deacon in The United Methodist Church, but I worked on staff as the discipleship coordinator. It was a busy week day in the office when we received a call at the church. One of our members was in the hospital in Kansas City, just forty-five minutes east of us. Bill hopped in the car and headed east.

Fifteen minutes down the road, his cell phone rang. Another congregant was in the ICU; it was urgent. Except she was in the hospital in Lawrence, thirty minutes west of our little town.

Did I mention Bill was headed east?

It's a dilemma in which no pastor wants to find themselves: who "gets" my care today? But that was the choice Bill had to make. That was the day we (Bill and I, along with two other gifted souls from our church whom I'll tell more about later) registered for The Caring Congregation

Seminar, hosted by Rev. Karen Lampe at United Methodist Church of the Resurrection.

I hope your moment wasn't as potent as ours, but I imagine something—an event, a dilemma, an honest mistake—led you to this resource. As the twenty-first-century American church stares down the realities of our country's declining physical and mental health, financial crises, and the inevitable "death tsunami" predicted by Rev. Dr. Lovett Weems, it's becoming crystal clear that a pastor-centric model of care just isn't sustainable. We can't do this alone—and we were never meant to!

The Case for Laity

Long before the advent of smartphones, social media, and twenty-four-hour accessibility, ministry leaders still had to take care of the flock. And somehow, they still had time to tend to their own spiritual growth, and take on hobbies like breeding dogs (Rev. John Russell), or writing entire books on health care (Rev. John Wesley).

The Apostle Paul, arguably the most effective church planter in history, planted churches and then left! How in the world was that model sustainable, and why did it flourish the way that it did?

All human beings have certain gifts, skills, and abilities—but not by accident. God gave us these gifts and has called each of us to use them to be a blessing to the world. Paul talks about the church working like a body in 1 Corinthians 12:12-18:

Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. Certainly the body isn't one part but many. If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted.

In my time serving on the Congregational Excellence team for the Great Plains Annual Conference, I've learned that the key ingredient for an excellent congregation is excellent laity—people who are convinced of their call to ministry in every vocation, utilizing their God-given gifts for the sake of making disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world.

Pastors, it's time to get out of the way. Your people have been gifted by God—some of them to care for others—and when we take the reins for ourselves, we deny people opportunities to be who they were called to be.

The First Class

The drive from the Caring Congregation Seminar to our bedroom community was forty-five minutes. After two days of soaking up all we could at the seminar, you would think we'd have been exhausted. Not so! On the way home, our team—comprising my husband; Carissa, our youth group leader; Alice, a gifted layperson; and myself—spent the entire forty-five minutes brainstorming, tailoring, and beginning the first and most vital step to a successful Congregational Care Ministry: identifying that first class of CCMs.

The Congregational Care Minister is the foundation of the ministry. Without ministers, the system collapses, which is why it is so vital, especially in the early stages, to choose the right people with the right dispositions to serve. The following section will help you identify qualities in an ideal care minister.

The Ideal Care Minister

The Congregational Care Ministry is modeled after Jesus, who healed the sick, cared for the poor, and had compassion on those who suffered physically, mentally, spiritually, and systemically. Upon reading the Gospels, we encounter the Wounded Healer willing to touch the untouchables, interact with those on the margins of society, and deliver people

from all sorts of ailments with compassion, dignity, and empathy. This is the example we follow as disciples of Christ and as care ministers.

Easier said than done, right? I know I don't live up to that standard all the time, and the beauty of the good news is that there's grace when we don't emulate Jesus as well as we would like to. And the beauty of the Congregational Care Ministry model is that, while we strive to embody Jesus's example, we also follow a long and historical tradition of caring for others in our midst. Care didn't stop with Jesus.

Before Jesus was arrested and crucified, he sat at a table with his closest companions. He got up, took his outer garments off, wrapped himself in a towel, and began washing the disciples' feet. It was a shocking display of servanthood—one the disciples didn't quite understand. Jesus explained his entire ministry in that subversive act: he was the leader of a movement threatening to topple the empire, yet he took on the work of a servant. The way of Jesus is servant leadership, and he calls us to the same.

That same night, Jesus commanded the disciples to love one another. It seems obvious, but with a group like the disciples—full of zealots and tax collectors and Roman collaborators—Jesus needed to say it out loud one more time. Because the only way people will know we follow Jesus is if we love one another. That's it. The way we love one another, the way we care for one another—that's the model we strive for with the Congregational Care Ministry.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples were left to continue his ministry on earth. As the movement grew, it became clear that they needed to organize by defining roles and responsibilities. Acts 6 tells us that the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in their midst were being neglected, so the disciples chose a core group of seven *diakonia*, from which we derive the word *deacon*, to provide care and concern for those who needed it.

In the New Testament, *diakonia* was the ministry of service, aid, and support. The word began as a word to describe a person who waits on tables, then expanded to someone who cared for all household needs, and eventually came to mean general service. It naturally implies a level of personal subjugation to another, putting a person's needs above their own.

Deacons in the early church were women and men who assisted in liturgical logistics; proclamation of the word and Christian mission; and general ministry in the church, which included a variety of actions. As the role of the *diakonos* developed, it became one in which servant leaders attended to public worship, the care of the poor, and administration.

An early church collection of treatises known as the Apostolic Constitutions prescribes that deacons are to visit “all those who stand in need of visitation,”¹ and Cyprian of Carthage called on those in ministry to “always pray for one another” and to “relieve burdens and afflictions by mutual love.”²

Ministry leaders, as you begin implementing the first essential, consider laypeople who embody servant leadership, prayer, and mutual love, care, and concern. Who comes to mind? Jot down their names. Let your list be as short or long as you are led, then pray over your potential CCMs.

On the way home from the seminar, we had so much fun brainstorming all the folks in our midst who embodied such admirable and Christ-like qualities that we found our list was actually too long! Our average worship attendance was around 175, so we only needed five CCMs in addition to our pastoral staff. We didn’t need as many people as we had listed, so we began narrowing down, utilizing the criteria provided in *The Caring Congregation Training Manual and Resource Guide*:

1. Active member who has established a deep connection to the church.
2. Regular worship attendance.
3. Scriptural and theological foundation, and a willingness to learn.
4. Knowledge and study of scripture to provide a foundation for care ministry.
5. Active pursuit of growth in the Christian life through participation in a small group or some other form of Christian discipleship.

6. Deeply committed Christian who lives out a life of faith through acts of piety (love of God) and mercy (love of neighbor).
7. Giving financially in proportion to their income with the tithe being the goal.
8. Safe gatherings or other types of certification to assure their understanding of boundaries. Each church needs to decide what type of certification will be required.
9. Expected to commit to at least three hours per week to this ministry.³

We found that some on our list embodied all of these qualities, while others weren't as regular in their worship attendance as we'd have liked our CCMs to be. A couple others would have been a great fit, but we already knew how busy their schedules were, and we knew they wouldn't be able to commit the amount of time each week we knew we needed. After a time of discernment, we had identified our five CCMs we wanted for our first class, and we began recruiting.

Ministry leaders, take a look at your list of possible CCMs again. Identify how many you'd like in your first class of CCMs, and take a look at the criteria provided. Who stands out now?

Recruiting Your CCMs

Once you have narrowed your list down to the ones you believe would be a great first class of CCMs, it's time to recruit! Here are a few tips for effective CCM recruitment:

1. Pray, pray, pray. Pray for the church, the ministry, the people who have been called to care for others, and those who will be receiving care on behalf of the congregation. Ask God to give you eyes to see gifts in those who provide care well.

2. Be picky and practice discernment. Don't be OK with "any warm body" who will say yes to your begging. We don't work out of a scarcity mentality!
3. Face-to-face invitation to apply. Seek out individuals you've intentionally identified as possible CCMs. Phone calls, emails, texts, and pulpit/bulletin announcements certainly are helpful, but be careful with how you extend the invitation. Make it clear that there is an application process that will discern if being a CCM is a good fit. This is an invitation, not an ask, favor, or plea. Invite applicants to join you in sharing God's care and concern to the congregation and community.

Notice that the third point is an invitation to *apply*. Even if you already have a good idea of who should make up your core leadership team and subsequent CCMs, ask these persons to fill out an application. This is a vital step as the ministry continues to grow and more and more people are interested in serving as a CCM.

You may receive some pushback and even criticism for this, since many churches function in a "first come, first served" or "sign up to serve" mentality. For some ministries of the church, that model is great! We want to allow opportunities for all people to serve in some capacity at the church. The Congregational Care Ministry is not one of those opportunities. CCMs will be deployed on behalf of the church to provide care to people facing some of their darkest, most confusing times in their lives, and it is imperative to vet and train those who will share in these moments.

Determine your selection process ahead of time. We suggest a two-phase process:

1. Each person is asked to fill out an application, which asks for a spiritual biography.
2. Following the application submission, interviews are conducted with a pastor and staff member.

Consider the following interview questions:

1. What are two or three things in your life/faith story that are defining moments for you?
2. Tell me about how worship plays a role in your life.
3. What has been your discipleship journey so far?
4. In what ways have you practiced Christian service?
5. Tell me about any class or Bible studies you've participated in.
6. Why do you want to be a CCM? What does a life totally surrendered to God mean to you?
7. What does your daily practice of the spiritual disciplines look like? How do you explain grace? What is your faith autobiography?
8. When have you had a challenging experience in your life? What did you do? Who was involved? How did you handle it? From whom did you seek help?
9. Imagine you are in a one-on-one scenario, giving care. Who benefits? Where is God in this?

The interviewer informs the applicant that someone will call soon. Close by praying with the applicant. After the interview, debrief with your interview team, share any notes you take, and make decisions.

Not every member of your congregation will have the gifts and skills necessary to fill this role of caring for the congregation. In these cases, we try to direct people to other possibilities for volunteering where their unique gifts can best be used. Trust your gut and the collective experience of others. It is far better to redirect applicants to another area of ministry early in the discernment process rather than have a difficult conversation later about possible other places to serve. Some questions to consider as you practice discernment:

1. Are they healed from past wounds?
2. Do they need more time or experience to study? If so, invite them to apply again in the future.

3. Would there be a better fit for their gifts in a different ministry area?

Equipping Your CCMs

Once your CCMs have said yes, it's crucial to equip them well. CCMs will be partnering with pastors to offer some of the care previously done only by a pastor, so it is important that these persons have basic theological and biblical training. We suggest equipping your CCMs with theological and biblical training through an intensive study like Disciple Bible Study, Christian Believer, or a similar resource.

It is also imperative to train your CCMs in the logistics and practices of the Congregational Care Ministry model. We invite you to utilize parts 2 and 3 of this book as a script for training the basics. These training modules work best when each CCM receives the companion resource, *The Caring Congregation Ministry: Care Minister's Manual*.

Training can be done over the course of a weekend, seminar-style. It can also be broken into one module per week over the course of a couple of months. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us all to reimagine former ways of connecting and learning, and we encourage you to continue offering digital options for accessible training. Decide what works best for your context and your CCMs. Once you have established the model for training, determine your dates. If other churches in the area or in your network are also implementing the Congregational Care Ministry, consider hosting a training together to share resources and teaching responsibilities. Secure a room large enough to accommodate your CCMs with round tables and chairs of no more than eight people at each table. If you are hosting a seminar-style weekend, consider kicking off your event with a worship service and closing with the commissioning service provided to you in chapter 5. Be sure to purchase a copy of the *Care Minister's Manual* for each participant, along with any other commissioning gifts, which could include a Bible, anointing vials, congregational care card sets (can be purchased at <https://thewell.cor.org/>), official CCM name tags with the church's logo, and official CCM business cards and stationery with

the church's logo (these come in handy during visits, especially in nursing facilities or hospitals, to leave a note if the person is sleeping when a CCM arrives or is unable to remember the visit).

Continuing Education

Once your CCMs have completed the basic training modules, we encourage you to regularly provide continuing education opportunities for your CCMs. The chapters in part 3 of this book serve as some jumping-off points as you consider offering continuing education. It is up to you to determine what “regular” looks like in your context. For some churches, quarterly meetings are sufficient and helpful; other churches host weekly meetings to unpack, share insights, and bring case studies to the group. Possible topics for continuing education could include member assistance, medical information, caring for the frail, hospice care, information technology, ministry to people with dementia and their families, self-care, development of a recovery ministry, and mental health ministry. The possibilities are endless!

Assessing Your Community

In this chapter, you have learned that the first essential to building your Congregational Care Ministry is to recruit and equip your Congregational Care Ministers. As you begin implementing the first essential, take some time to reflect on the following questions and ideas.

1. What does an ideal Congregational Care Minister look like in your context?
2. Brainstorm a list of laity who exhibit gifts that align with those of a CCM.
3. Develop a plan for recruiting your first class of CCMs.

A MODEL OF CARE FOR EVERY CHURCH

People need care, and in churches everywhere, leaders struggle to provide it. The distinctively lay-centric Caring Congregation Ministry model provides a solution and has been adopted by faith communities of all sizes and types.

In this model of care, laypersons serve as **Congregational Care Ministers (CCMs)**, caring for the people in their own congregation. *The Caring Congregation Ministry: Implementation Guide* shows leaders **how to develop, launch, and sustain this ministry**. It begins by teaching the **five essentials** for a Caring Congregation and provides **lists, forms, and other tools**. The midsection includes the **basics for CCM training**, and the final chapters address particular issues some congregations face, such as **communal trauma and mental health**.

A separate book, *The Caring Congregation Ministry: Care Minister's Manual* serves as the CCM's training workbook and reference resource.

How to Use These Resources:

- Pastors and other leaders seeking to develop this ministry should begin by reading the **Implementation Guide**.
- Before they begin training, CCMs should read the **Implementation Guide**.
- CCMs should use the **Care Minister's Manual** during their training and then keep it handy for reference throughout their time of service.

"It's impossible overstate the importance of providing excellent care in a local church. *The Caring Congregation Ministry* offers the very best program for training laity in congregational care. This book provides a step-by-step guide for implementing the program in any size congregation."

—**Adam Hamilton**, senior pastor, The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, KS

The Caring Congregation Ministry . . .

" . . . makes it possible to implement a well-rounded, theologically sound, customizable system of care."

—**Joy Dister-Dominguez**, pastor, Arlington Heights UMC, Fort Worth, TX

" . . . ignited a fire in our congregation and empowered the laity to serve. This is one of the most effective and essential tools for any church."

—**Monica Childers**, associate pastor and minister of adult leadership development, St. Luke's UMC, Hickory, NC

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