



THE
CONCISE
GUIDE FOR
CONGREGATIONAL
CARE

Words to Use in Every Setting

Melissa Gepford

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CARE

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 Abingdon Press®

THE CONCISE GUIDE FOR CONGREGATIONAL CARE

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FOREWORD

Nearly every day of ministry for pastors and congregational care ministers is full of opportunity to help others find redemption, resurrection, and wholeness in the midst of trauma and pain. But anyone who is actively serving to provide care will at times feel ill equipped or unprepared. The situations can be extraordinarily challenging. The conversations are often startlingly difficult.

There have been times when I have prayed, “Okay, Lord, if I’m all you’ve got, I’ll go. But I’m on my knees asking for your Holy Spirit to guide me.” All of us pastors and care ministers—no matter how long we’ve been doing ministry—are looking for practical guidance and help to offer the very best care in Jesus’s name.

This text should give you a measure of confidence that you can provide Christlike healing for just about any human situation. You’ll find a framework of care for the settings and circumstances you’re most likely to encounter. You’ll be able to quickly turn to talking points, scriptures, resources, and prayers or words of encouragement that are just right for the situation, which you can read aloud or modify using your own words.

This book is streamlined and concise, so you’ll find it to be handy as well as highly functional. We hope you will tuck the book into your glovebox, backpack, or bag,

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or keep it in your pocket. You might also keep a copy in the top drawer of your desk, or beside your chair in the space where you provide spiritual guidance and prayer.

I encourage you to make this book your own, too. Add your favorite passages to the lists of scriptures. Write out words of prayer that have been most powerful in your settings. Make notes of the important resources in your area. When you gain an insight that will help in other situations, write it down. This book includes space for *you*.

My hope is that you are working with at least one other person as a congregational care team. Consider going through the book together, discussing each situation and sharing in role play using the words and guidance in the book. This will help you get comfortable using the book and will equip you for the situations you'll face as a congregational care provider. And you will learn from one another! I have learned so much by listening to how others would offer care. What a gift it is to grow together as a team as you offer healing.

We all have books that are our “working” texts. I hope and believe this book will become a close companion for your daily ministry. I am praying for you now: new courage, assurance, and the light of Christ.

And let it be so,

Rev. Karen Lampe

Founding Pastor, The Caring Congregation

www.thecaringcongregation.com

INTRODUCTION

When I received my first assignment to visit a family whose mother was actively dying, I sped to the nursing facility with my care essentials—a Bible, a set of congregational care ministry cards (these contain information on specific care topics), a congregational caregiver’s manual, a pen and pad of paper to take notes, and a vial of anointing oil. In hindsight, I really needed a backpack to lug all of that around!

The family greeted me warmly at the door of the nursing facility and led me to their mother’s room. It was quiet, pregnant with holy pause, as the veil between heaven and earth got thinner and thinner. I offered to read some scripture and pray with the family. Then I found myself rummaging through care cards, flipping through my Bible to different verses I’d bookmarked, and fumbled the vial of oil. Nothing like a clumsy pastor to really dampen the mood.

I say I needed a backpack, but what I *really* needed was one book that I could bring along with me that had scriptures and prayers easily accessible for that particular visit to eliminate the rummaging, flipping, and fumbling.

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Perhaps you, too, have thought how useful a little booklet like that would be. If you are like most care ministers, you are constantly on the run, visiting people in hospitals, care centers, and homes. You need a resource where the right material is available to you at a moment's notice, at your fingertips. You need a resource that equips you in just a few moments, preparing you for each encounter, so that you're ready with accurate information, helpful questions, and words of comfort and wisdom. You need a resource that's portable, one that you can carry with you wherever you go to provide care. And you need a resource that's appropriate for the serious, weighty, and sacred occasions in which you serve. For most of us, that means a simple, quiet, subdued, printed book—not a phone or tablet.

This concise guide is a portable and easy-to-use tool, which includes the full text of prayers, scripture passages, and other material that are helpful for reading or sharing with people.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This *Concise Guide to Congregational Care* is for pastors, congregational care ministers (CCMs), and others who provide care to congregation members and others in their communities. It is even helpful for people who wish to provide spiritual care for family and friends. This

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book offers the essentials for in-person or remote visits and calls on the most common and important topics.

Part 1 offers quick reminders of the foundations for care: key points to remember for theology, boundaries, procedures and practices, and technology as a tool for care.

Part 2 provides the full text of relevant scripture passages, brief prayers, and blessings for times of crisis, challenging life events or situations during which people need care. It also includes important talking points, along with lists of other books, organizations, and resources. You'll turn to this section again and again to find just the right few words in even the most challenging circumstance. Words are so important, and this section will help you use them to offer real help, and not harm.

Part 3 equips you to be a meaningful spiritual guide in moments that go beyond crisis care. Those moments include adoption, blessing of a home, blessing of pets, celebrating growth, graduations, and many other milestones and seasons of life. You'll find scripture passages and brief prayers for each topic. This section also includes guidance and instruction for conducting a brief anointing service, which is useful in a variety of situations.

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At the back of the book, you'll find a list of key resources consisting of helpful tools, websites, and more for specific topics.

The Concise Guide to Congregational Care works best when used as an aid in care calls or visits. When preparing for such a conversation, you will likely know the topic you will address with the person receiving care. I invite you to bookmark the section of the book you intend to use for easy access when providing care.

In parts 2 and 3, each brief section addresses a particular topic or situation, and provides a number of appropriate scripture references. The full text for each scripture passage is included, eliminating the need to flip between this book and your Bible. You may read each scripture or choose a couple that best fit the situation.

A prayer is also provided for each topic. You may read the written prayer aloud, or if you are more comfortable praying from the heart rather than reading a written prayer, please do so! The prayers here might make a good starting point for your own prayers.

In some caregiving situations, you will need extra preparation and more specific words to use. This is especially true in new settings, particularly painful or sensitive situations, or in circumstances that you've not encountered before. In these cases, we suggest you consider reviewing the relevant talking points, which you'll find just after the scriptures and prayers.

THE CARING CONGREGATION MINISTRY

This *Concise Guide to Congregational Care* is based on resources that are part of The Caring Congregation Ministry system. The Caring Congregation Ministry is a model for person-to-person care that has been proven to work in small and large churches across the United States. It is a laity-centered ministry, where laypersons receive rigorous training and then are commissioned to serve as congregational care ministers, caring for others in their own congregation and their extended community.

This ministry of Congregational Care was started at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection by the Reverend Karen Lampe, when church leaders and Karen realized that their ministry could be so much more effective if they had a trained group of volunteers to help with all of the caring ministries including hospital calls, support groups/classes, pastoral listening, and any other number of care needs. The ministry grew, was refined, and became an integral part of Resurrection's congregational life. Other church leaders asked for guidance as they sought to develop this type of ministry for their own congregations. This model of care has been utilized and adapted for many different denominations and scales well to fit any sized church. And now it has been shared with churches throughout the United States.

After retirement from local church ministry, Rev. Lampe established The Caring Congregation, LLC, which hosts seminars, webinars, podcasts, and virtual courses in this method of care. She raised up a team of women throughout the country that collaborates in coaching, consulting, and curating resources to bolster local churches around the world in their congregational care ministries. This book is one of those resources.

HOW THE CARING CONGREGATION MINISTRY MODEL WORKS

Caring for people can get messy. We recognize that each person's concern or crisis is unique and will require wisdom in determining the next right step for them. We have outlined three general steps to provide care effectively as a congregation.

1. *Intake and Dispatch*—Director and dispatcher curate and assign each care request to a CCM (see the digital files for examples of prayer request cards and other useful resources for intake and dispatch).
2. *Follow Up*—CCMs receive their assignments weekly and follow up with the person requesting care.

3. *Documentation*—After each assigned follow-up, the CCM documents their interaction.

This book provides aid solely within the “Follow Up” section—with a gentle (yet firm!) reminder to document after every follow-up, visit, or call!

This information can be stored in a shared drive, on paper, or on some other platform. Regardless of the mode, this information should be kept in a safe place for confidential purposes, while also being accessible to, at least, the director of congregational care. We do this for accountability and information sharing, should another CCM be providing care for that person in another CCM’s absence.

A word on confidentiality: the trust that people give to you as pastors and CCMs can never be overlooked. You must be vigilant in this regard. To this end, set guidelines on the type of information that should be kept under lock and key, accessible to the pastor only. If the documents are digital, be sure they are either password protected, require a church-issued email address, or both.

You will find a holistic view of The Caring Congregation Ministry system, training modules, and more in *The Caring Congregation Ministry: Implementation Guide* and *The Caring Congregation Ministry: Care Minister’s Manual*. The *Implementation Guide* is the main book for

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getting started. It introduces the ministry model and explains the five essentials that form the ministry's foundation. It is practical, full of checklists and other tools to help pastors and other leaders understand (and explain) this way of providing congregational care.

The *Care Minister's Manual* is the personal training workbook and reference guide for CCMs, who serve a central role in the caring congregation ministry. CCMs receive in-depth training, where they learn the theological foundations of congregational care, plus the behaviors, habits, and practices they will need to follow in order to serve others well. Each CCM-in-training should have a copy of the *Care Minister's Manual*. It serves as their training workbook, which then becomes the CCM's personal reference guide.

This book, *The Concise Guide to Congregational Care*, is an essential tool for CCMs and others who provide care. It is the portable resource that quickly and appropriately provides caregivers with the right words to say in any situation.