

# CATHOLIC ELDERCARE

*A Life-Giving Experience*



WE NEED CONSTANTLY TO  
REMINDE OURSELVES OF  
OUR MISSION, PROFESSIONAL  
RESPONSIBILITY AND SACRED  
OBLIGATION TO THE  
ENTIRE COMMUNITY.

## FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

We are glad you have picked up this booklet about eldercare which speaks to:

- ◆ the importance of striving for a life-giving experience in eldercare communities.
- ◆ the values, attitudes and characteristics required of such a commitment.
- ◆ the cooperation and engagement of all involved.

This was prepared for the Catholic health eldercare ministries. Its appeal, however, should be universal, since the needs, values and aspirations described are deeply human and shared by virtually all those in this field. To serve well in eldercare — whether in nursing facilities, home care, rehabilitation, day care, retirement centers or senior housing — we need constantly to remind ourselves of our mission, professional responsibility and sacred obligation to the entire community, especially those for whom we care.

We invite the elders for whom we care, their families, eldercare workers and others to come up with your own attributes of life-giving eldercare. This booklet might also serve as a stimulus to review your organization's efforts in creating an eldercare community in which all truly can flourish. In any case, we hope it helps renew your own commitment to and justified pride in participating in eldercare ministry.

With appreciation,

The Catholic Health Association of the United States  
Continuing Care and Aging Services Committee



I will never be able  
to thank you enough for  
your kindness, compassion  
and understanding during  
this time in my life.  
Your support was a blessing.



DEDICATED ELDERCARE  
COMMUNITIES CAN HELP  
ELDERS WHO ARE RECOVERING  
FROM ILLNESS OR DEALING  
WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS  
AND FRAILTY, EXPERIENCE  
A GOOD LIFE.

## LIFE-GIVING COMMUNITY

*For where two or three are gathered together in my name,  
there am I in the midst of them.*

*Matthew 18:20*

The Gospel of John (10:10) assures us that Jesus came so that we might have life and have it to the full. If there is anything that life teaches us, it is that we are the agents of that promise — in our own lives and in that of family, friends and others. A fulfilled life is not a solo project. We need others to enrich and help us on our journey. It is an ongoing project throughout life to get to know and care for one another, to live up to our responsibility for one another, and in turn, to accept that others want to know and care for us.

It is our conviction as an eldercare community — elders and their families, eldercare staff, administration, boards of directors, benefactors and volunteers — that we can help one another experience life and experience it to the full.

Dedicated eldercare communities can help elders who are recovering from illness or dealing with chronic illness and frailty, experience a good life. After all, the things that bring a sense of well-being are common throughout the life span — love and kindness, recognition of one another's dignity and self-determination and generosity. Eldercare communities demonstrating those behaviors are places where everyone feels cared for and safe.

As you read this resource on life-giving eldercare we hope it will bring to mind the elements of a life-giving community for yourself. Perhaps it will cause you to think of specific ways that your eldercare facility could be more life-giving.



WE TRULY ATTEMPT TO  
BE GOD'S HEALING PRESENCE  
IN THE WORLD.

## LIFE-GIVING ENVIRONMENT

*Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.*

*Isaiah 40:1*

Eldercare facilities are sacred places because people care for one another here, pray here, rejoice and suffer here and sometimes live or even die here. It's important that those for whom we care — including caregivers and staff, friends and families — experience a welcoming, attractive, comfortable and safe environment.

Many eldercare ministries are the legacy of religious communities of women whose selfless, loving motivation in establishing them is still manifest. Preserving this legacy cannot be left to chance. Just as did the founders, we truly attempt to be God's healing presence in the world.

That is not just pious talk. It is brought to life in many ways. For instance, it comes to life through our commitment to the competent and compassionate care of those we serve, to the quality of our relationships with one another and with the broader community, and even to the appearance of the facility and its grounds. It calls for respect, courtesy, responsiveness, patience and loving attention to the more vulnerable and frail persons among us.

It also reflects our conviction that all of creation and all wealth flowing from it is a gift, given and held in trust for all. And so our founders' legacy is expressed in our careful use of resources and our care for our natural surroundings.

OUR FOUNDERS' LEGACY IS  
EXPRESSED IN OUR CAREFUL  
USE OF RESOURCES AND  
OUR CARE FOR OUR NATURAL  
SURROUNDINGS.

The entire eldercare community has an important role in maintaining a life-giving environment:

- ◆ **THOSE WE SERVE**, whose participation and partnership are essential.

*They are the reason we are here and their ideas can help us improve all we do.*

- ◆ **FAMILIES AND FRIENDS**, whose presence and advocacy their loved ones count on.

*The organization depends on them to help us to know their loved ones. We pledge to have clear channels for them to express their concerns and to be responsive to their constructive suggestions.*

- ◆ **BOARD MEMBERS**, whose stewardship encompasses the mission and spirit of the organization as well as its capital and financial assets.

*Their leadership serves as a moral compass for the organization.*

- ◆ **VOLUNTEERS**, who provide friendship and service, and benefactors whose generous support sustains us and allows us to invest in advances in eldercare.

*They reminds us that our relationships extend into our neighborhood and are connected to the broader community.*

- ◆ **ADMINISTRATORS**, who are vigilant about and accountable for the daily management and living out of values and professional standards.

*They are intentional about setting a positive tone and strive to make policies, practices and communications transparent and friendly as possible for everyone.*





WE CAN HELP ONE ANOTHER  
 EXPERIENCE LIFE AND  
 EXPERIENCE IT TO THE FULL.

- ◆ **DIRECT CAREGIVERS**, to whom we entrust the comprehensive needs of our residents — physical, emotional, spiritual and cultural.

*Their sensitivity to elders can significantly affect the well-being of those they care for. They demonstrate patience, compassion and respect in all their encounters.*

- ◆ **ALL STAFF MEMBERS**, including those who prepare the food, clean the facility, keep the records, answer the phones and greet visitors.

*Support staff are valuable in establishing quality relationships with those we serve and their families as well as with co-workers.*

Mission-focused eldercare is alert to every opportunity to improve the life-giving environment. The views of all members of the eldercare community are both sought and valued. It takes an entire eldercare community to build and preserve a life-giving environment!



May the Lord bless this organization and the people who work here to make it such a good place to be.  
Thank You!



THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS  
A TRIVIAL ENCOUNTER OR AN  
UNIMPORTANT DETAIL WHEN  
IT COMES TO THE MATTER OF  
CARING FOR ELDERS.

## LIFE-GIVING CARE

*Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters,  
you did for me.*

*Matthew 25:40*

Wouldn't it be nice if everyone in our care could say, "It is good for me to be here"? This is not to deny that some less-than-desirable circumstances require elders being in our programs and facilities, whether for day care, rehabilitation, time-limited stays to recover from an illness, for housing, or for the long-term care not available in their homes.

It is simply to acknowledge that it is within our power to make our organization a place in which life may be changed, but, all things considered, is still good. We also have a sacred responsibility to make it so.

As workers in Catholic health care, we participate in a noble profession that is also a ministry. Ours is a calling to care for the intimate health needs of persons. It is far more than a job.

There is no such thing as a trivial encounter or an unimportant detail when it comes to the matter of caring for elders. Many of those for whom we care have left the familiar setting of their own homes to make a new home with us. They now depend on us to assist them with things they have always done for themselves. We must understand that the elders for whom we care have led rich lives that we can never fully appreciate.

Every person we care for deserves every one of us to extend competent, compassionate care and assistance to make life here as good as it can be. We can do this by introducing ourselves, facilitating maximum independence, welcoming their family as guests and being truly present to them in all of our interactions.



WE MUST UNDERSTAND  
 THAT THE ELDERS FOR WHOM  
 WE CARE HAVE LED RICH  
 LIVES THAT WE CAN NEVER  
 FULLY APPRECIATE.

When we provide care that is life-giving we are mindful of our values and core commitments:

- ◆ **UNDERSTANDING** that wholeness in health requires assessing fully what elders need — physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.
- ◆ **PROMOTING DIGNITY** by taking the time to be gentle and loving as we assist in bathing and feeding our elders and by being respectful in the way we assist in dressing and covering them.
- ◆ **BEING COMPASSIONATE** at all times and providing high quality pain management, dementia and end-of-life care.
- ◆ **RESPECTING** elders' privacy and keeping their confidences.
- ◆ **ADVOCATING** on behalf of those who, for various reasons, do not, or cannot, speak up themselves.

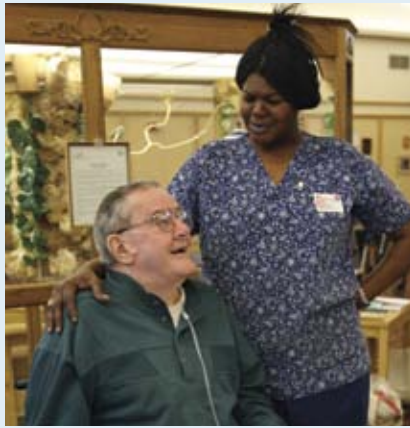
Life-giving care also means respecting preferences in how and where care is delivered. We endeavor to handle residents' care needs to the extent possible in our facility so they are not subjected to unnecessary hospitalizations. We also develop protocols to promote seamless care during the transitions between home, hospital, senior housing and even within our own facility.

Because Catholic eldercare wishes to nourish the spirit as well as the body, spiritual care is central to the life-giving care we provide. Understanding that physical and spiritual well-being are mutually reinforcing, we try to know and respect the religious affiliation of those we serve and make every effort to maintain residents' relationships to their local faith community.

We invite residents, families and staff to call on pastoral care as needed and to use our chapel or quiet room to pray and reflect. Our long-term care facilities celebrate liturgies and religious holidays. We also offer the opportunity for the eldercare community to gather in prayer and remembrance of residents and staff who have died.



I try to give the care  
I would want for my family.  
Receiving a smile because of  
something I did makes me  
smile. My work is much  
more than a job.



ELDERCARE WORKERS  
ARE ALSO PRECIOUS  
IN GOD'S SIGHT.

## LIFE-GIVING WORKPLACE

*For we are partners working together for God, and you are God's field.*

*1 Corinthians 39*

Our Catholic tradition has some very important ideas about work and workers. We understand work to be our way of contributing to God's ongoing creation in the world. It provides each of us a way to contribute to the common good.

Work is not just a way to support our families and pay our bills. It is — or can be — a moral and spiritual endeavor. Leaders of life-giving workplaces care about workers, and not simply about the work they do. They strive to provide the setting for caregivers to find meaning and fulfillment in their work.

We believe that working in health care is a calling, a vocation as much as it is a job, because we are caring for others who are precious in God's sight. Let us not forget that eldercare workers are also precious in God's sight. They, too, are deserving of respect and care — from the board of directors, administration, residents, families, volunteers and one another.

A life-giving workplace doesn't just happen. It takes a great deal of effort. The entire eldercare community must be intentional about it. Although we can identify responsibilities for a life-giving workplace specific to administration, employees, residents and families, it requires that there be common understanding of the mission and genuine mutual respect for everyone.

Recognizing the central place eldercare workers occupy in a life-giving organization, eldercare facilities hire workers whose suitability for the care of elders has been carefully assessed. We look for individuals who are "mission ready" as well as technically competent.



IN ELDERCARE, DIRECT  
CAREGIVERS ARE, IN A  
VERY REAL SENSE,  
THE KEY WORKERS.

We know it is important that all staff members have the knowledge, skills and resources to do their jobs well. We offer opportunities for staff development and advancement. We share with our workers our facility's mission and values, seeking their views on how to best live them. We believe those in leadership and supervisory positions must be competent in both clinical and management skills.

To create a life-giving workplace, we:

- ◆ **SEEK THE VIEWS** of staff, on a regular basis, concerning ways to improve their work and the way the organization works.
- ◆ **PROVIDE** just compensation while being fully aware that no package can adequately capture the value of the services provided.
- ◆ **FACILITATE TEAMWORK** and collaboration so that everyone's contributions are sought and used, and our elders well-served.
- ◆ **EXPRESS GRATITUDE** for the many ways eldercare workers go above and beyond their required duties.

Good workplaces recognize that differences in position do not reflect differences in worth. In fact, in eldercare, direct caregivers are, in a very real sense, the key workers. The quality of care they provide can make all the difference in the lives of those for whom they care.

Wanting to do the best they can, direct caregivers:

- ◆ **TAKE ADVANTAGE** of in-service education.
- ◆ **COMMIT** themselves to continuous improvement.
- ◆ **HELP ONE ANOTHER** when the occasion calls for it, and call one another to higher standards when necessary.
- ◆ **TAKE ISSUES** and ideas for improving the workplace and care they render to administration.

The entire eldercare community, not just eldercare workers, benefits from a good workplace. We invite elders and families to find ways to contribute to the organization's ongoing efforts to create a high-quality, friendly, mutually respectful workplace.



WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF  
CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE,  
A MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH  
CONTINUING JESUS' MISSION  
OF LOVE AND HEALING TODAY.

## A SHARED STATEMENT OF IDENTITY FOR THE CATHOLIC HEALTH MINISTRY

We are the people of Catholic health care, a ministry of the Church continuing Jesus' mission of love and healing today. As provider, employer, advocate, citizen — bringing together people of diverse faiths and backgrounds — our ministry is an enduring sign of health care rooted in our belief that every person is a treasure, every life a sacred gift, every human being a unity of body, mind, and spirit.

We work to bring alive the Gospel vision of justice and peace. We answer God's call to foster healing, act with compassion, and promote wellness for all persons and communities, with special attention to our neighbors who are poor, underserved, and most vulnerable. By our service, we strive to transform hurt into hope.

As the church's ministry of health care, we commit to:

- Promote and Defend Human Dignity.
- Attend to the Whole Person.
- Care for Poor and Vulnerable Persons.
- Promote the Common Good.
- Act on Behalf of Justice.
- Steward Resources.
- Act in Communion with the Church.





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ISBN 0-87125-277-5

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