Companions in Hope: The Art of Christian Caring

Robert J. Wicks and Thomas E. Rodgerson
Panlist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1998, 228 pp., $16.95 (paperback)

This hope-filled book calls on the entire Christian community to provide intentional caring. In the introduction, the authors write that “such caring has the potential to set people free and to enable them to live more complete lives as children of God.”

The book evolved out of the Christian community’s role as “gatekeepers”—we are often the first to see evidence of distress in others and decide if the distress warrants professional help. Its premise is that the role of the caring Christian should be acknowledged as critical in providing preventive and strategic care.

The book, addressed to a nonprofessional audience, is divided into 12 chapters, which combine a strong scriptural basis with sound pastoral theology and well-grounded psychological tenets. The chapters evolve from “Caring to Listen: Overcoming Resistance”; “Caring to Listen: Standing on Holy Ground”; “Intentional Caring: Conversation with a Goal” and “Intentional Caring: The Care that Works: A Relationship Approach to Persons with Dementia
Jitka M. Zgola, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1999, 256 pp., $18.95 (paperback)

The author explains that optimal dementia care involves three elements: a good relationship between the caregiver and the person who has dementia, a safe and nurturing environment, and meaningful activities. She then describes how caregivers can better meet the demanding challenges of their job by building and improving their personal relationships with those in their care. The book gives caregivers information with which they can develop their own approaches, evaluate their effectiveness, and continue to grow in skill and insight. The book also discusses communicating with people who have language deficits and coping with behavior problems.

Genetic Testing for Alzheimer Disease: Ethical and Clinical Issues

In this book experts from the fields of ethics, genetics, policy, neurology, philosophy, and anthropology examine the ethical and social aspects of genetic testing for Alzheimer’s disease. Topics include current genetic findings and their clinical applicability, as well as ethical issues in genetic testing and genetic counseling for Alzheimer’s disease. Also covered are confidentiality, fairness, and discrimination in healthcare, and ways to educate professionals and laypeople about these topics.

An Ethics Casebook for Hospitals: Practical Approaches to Everyday Cases
Mark G. Kuczewski and Rosa Lynn B. Pinkus, Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 1999, 219 pp., $23.95 (paperback)

This book is a collection of cases with commentary and bibliographic resources designed especially for educational efforts in community hospitals. The cases deal with fundamental problems, including where to send a frail elderly patient who no longer seems to be able to care for herself but refuses to go to a nursing home, determining whether a patient has the mental capacity to make his own decisions regarding his treatment, what role the family should play in making a treatment decision when the choice made would greatly affect them, what a family should do if they suspect their mother is not getting proper care, and what a hospital should do when too many bills remain unpaid.
Art of Questioning and Responding” to chapters dealing with specific situations and common problems.

The book presents the rationale for Christian caregiving that God calls us to. As the authors explain: “More recent trends of budget cutting of social programs and the limiting of benefits for mental health by insurance companies increase the importance of the role of family and friends in preventive and strategic care. Others have long called for the community of faith to play a leading role in the mental health of our communities.”

As pastoral counselors, the authors have written a book that gives solid information about our need to be intentional caregivers. As with pastoral counseling, Christian caring is based on the belief that everyone in the community of faith can participate in a form of caring that is transformational. The authors state, “This book [is not] designed to turn the reader into a professional counselor. Instead, it is designed to enhance personal talents in the areas of listening, being supportive, problem solving, dealing with crises and knowing when and how to refer, in order to equip communities of caregivers who might work to facilitate spiritual growth on a broad level.”

As a professional chaplain who has worked for years with volunteer lay ministry development, I highly recommend this book as a text for continuing education for Christian caregivers. I would like to again quote the authors: “We cannot care without listening. If we do not listen, we do not care. The first service we owe to others in fellowship is to listen to them. If we fail to listen, there are spiritual consequences because as [Dietrich] Bonhoeffer says, ‘He who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either.’” Companion in Hope is, indeed, a message of hope to us all.

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