Jefferson Unitarian Church
Pastoral Care
Caring Visitors
Program Guide

Deepen, Connect & Engage
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Welcome to Caring Visitors!

The Pastoral Care Program at Jefferson Unitarian Church

First and foremost, thank you for your interest in participating in the shared ministry of care at Jefferson Unitarian Church. The Pastoral Care Program at Jefferson Unitarian Church is fulfilled through two main program areas. Pastoral Care Caring Visitors, which is the focus of this program guide, and Pastoral Care Connectors. The two programs work in partnership and, from time-to-time, congregants in care transition from one program to another, usually from Connectors to Caring Visitors. It is important to understand the particular ministries each program is involved in, and how they differ from each other.

Caring Visitors
Caring Visitors is an important ministerial program under the umbrella of the Pastoral Care Team. The overall mission statement for Pastoral Care at our church affirms: The Pastoral Care Team covenants with Jefferson Unitarian Church to enhance the capacity of all to care for one another. The purpose of our shared ministry is to cultivate the resilience needed to live full spiritual lives. In addition, the motto Pastoral Care: How JUCers care for each other underscores the commitment to providing opportunities for congregants to actively support each other in times of need.

Caring Visitors:

• Provide a confidential listening presence to those would benefit from an opportunity to talk about problems and feelings.
• Are matched with congregants who are isolated and may no longer be able to participate in worship or other church activities.
• Serve in a long-term, ongoing relationship.
• Work in collaboration with the ministerial team.
• Meet regularly for de-briefing and training.
Connectors

Connectors is another crucial pastoral care program at JUC. 

Connectors:

- Arrange and coordinate logistical support for church members/pledging friends experiencing a health crisis or other stressful situation.
- Provide assistance on a short-term, time-limited basis.
- Work with volunteer meal and ride providers.
- Serve with the guidance of the Connectors Coordinator.
- Meet quarterly in Connectors Circle for de-briefing and training.

Both programs, Caring Visitors and Connectors, require the ability to listen well, be emotionally present and practice healthy confidentiality. Both Connectors and Caring Visitors may need to make referrals to the ministers, other professionals or social service organizations.

Each program has a unique focus and provides different types of care.
Caring Visitors Meetings

Participants in the Caring Visitors (CV) program meet bi-monthly to receive training, reflect on their CV relationships, and receive support in this ministry. While it is understandable that from time-to-time Caring Visitors will be unable to make a meeting, the general expectation is that all CV’s come to each meeting if they are able. If you are having trouble making it to meetings, please let the CV coordinator or minister know about the problem and arrange to have a conversation about what can be done.

Meetings will follow a general format of opening reading, personal check-in (not about your match, just about you and your life), training, check-in about CV relationships, and a closing. Meetings are understood to be confidential, a place for CV’s to support each other and to be supported in this crucial work. As this ministry goes forward we expect to see shifts and changes in the format. For example, we have not yet determined how best to manage the balance of bringing in new members who will be ready when a match is needed. As changes occur, this manual will be updated to reflect current practice.
How Matches Are Made

• The minister working with the Pastoral Care Program meets privately with CV trainees to review their application forms, discuss their interests in depth, and develop a sense of their strengths.

• There are several ways congregants may be identified as needing care and possibly benefiting from being matched with an CV:
  o Congregants may self-identify and contact a Minister or Co-coordinator to request a CV.
  o Ministers, CV Program Coordinator(s), and current CV’s, and other Pastoral Care volunteers, such as Pastoral Care Leadership Team members and Connectors may identify and suggest congregants.

• CV Team identifies the CV best suited to help a specific congregant, based on strengths, interests, and location.

• The minister or coordinator contacts the identified CV to explain the circumstances and confirm that the CV will accept the match.

• That same person calls the congregant to let them know the name of the CV with whom they will be matched.

• Following the match being set-up, the CV calls the congregant within 24 hours to arrange the first visit, to be held within a week, preferably in-person.

Some of the Criteria Used to Make Matches

• Usually men are matched with men and women with women, although this will vary depending on the individuals involved.

• Can the two people have a deep conversation?

• Are there any transference problems, i.e. issues that may present immediate barriers to communication or connection? Being matched with someone who is already a friend is not productive. The friendship is primary and the CV relationship would probably not be effective.
Responsibilities, Guidelines and Logistics for Caring Visitor Relationships

Guidelines

- The only ones who should know of your Caring Visitor relationship(s) are the team minister, coordinator, other CV’s and church staff that the minister has authorized. In the case of care receivers with dementia, the relationship may be slightly less confidential.
- Once you are matched with a congregant, call them within 24 hours and schedule the first appointment, to be held within a week, preferably in person.
- Give them your phone number and let them know when it’s okay to call.
- Reschedule your appointment if you become sick with anything contagious.
- Meet at a location that provides privacy.
- During the first meeting:
  - Explain your role as a Caring Visitor.
  - Explain the confidentiality of the relationship.
  - Listen and provide companionship.
  - Establish a plan of the frequency (generally 1-2 times a month) and duration of visits/phone calls.
  - Schedule the next visit/phone call.
- Contact the coordinator if you have questions that must be addressed immediately instead of waiting for the next meeting of CV’s.
- Meals, rides, and other similar needs should be referred to the Connectors Program.
- Protect this relationship to focus on listening fully. It is important to set priorities and boundaries, so other aspects of your personal life don’t impinge on this relationship.
- Attend regularly scheduled CV meetings, which offer opportunities for debriefing CV relationships and also offer relevant training and development:
  - Give the group a little information about the circumstances of your congregant, without breaking confidentiality.
  - Ask the group for help if you have questions.
  - Allow the groups to offer suggestions.
Participate in helping your fellow CV’s as they process their role as a CV.

• Take notes during training for later reference.

• As the congregant begins to come to terms with their challenges, you will sense when it’s time to close the relationship.
  • Discuss with your congregant and determine their readiness and the best way to cut back on visits/calls.
  • Discuss any closure plans at CV meetings.

Recording Visits on Website Form

• Following each visit with a congregant it is important to record the date and relevant information on the Caring Visitors report form.

• Access this form on the JUC website at http://www.jeffersonunitarian.org/caringvisitors Keep the information concise, observing appropriate confidentiality.

• Click on ‘Submit’ to have it recorded on the ongoing CV log.

Term Limits for Caring Visitors

• Caring Visitors serve for two-year terms, which can be renewed following evaluation and review with ministers.

• Matches usually last a minimum of one year and can be renewed.

Caring Visitors Program Leadership

• A team consisting of a designated Team Minister and the Coordinator(s) is responsible for program direction. Other JUC ministers will be regularly updated, and consulted as needed.

• The Team Minister meets with JUC members interested in becoming Caring Visitors to discuss their application and aspects of the program.

• The Coordinator(s) handles various issues that may arise in a relationship between a CV and a congregant, and logistical questions.

• The Coordinator(s) oversees the planning of group meetings with current CV’s.

• All participants in the CV program are encouraged to source and share resources for the training segment of group meetings.
• The Coordinator(s) may serve as a CV at the same time they are part of the leadership team.
• The Coordinator(s) serves in this capacity for a two-year term which may be renewed for a second two-year term.
Helpful Resources

Listening & Companioning Skills

Nine Practices of a Good Listener

1. Listen to understand what is meant, not to ready yourself to reply, contradict or refute. This is extremely important as a general attitude.
2. Knowing what is meant involves more than the dictionary meanings of words used. It involves, among other things, the tone of voice, the facial expressions, and the overall behavior of the speaker.
3. Observe all this and be careful not to interpret too quickly. Look for clues as to what the other person is trying to say, putting yourself (as best you can) in the speaker’s shoes, seeing the world as the speaker sees it.
4. Put aside your own views and opinions for the time being. Realize that you cannot listen to yourself inwardly and at the same time listen outwardly to the speaker.
5. Control your impatience because listening happens faster than talking. The average person speaks about 125 words per minute, but can listen to about 400 words per minute. The effective listener does not jump ahead of the speaker, but gives time to tell the story.
6. Do not prepare your answer while you listen. Get the whole message before deciding what to say in return. The last sentence of the speaker may give a new slant to what was said before.
7. Show interest and alertness. This stimulates the speaker and improves sharing.
8. Do not interrupt. When you ask questions, it is to secure more information, not to trap or force the speaker into a corner.
9. Expect the speaker’s language to differ from the way you would say the “same thing” yourself. Do not quibble with words, but try to get at what the speaker is trying to convey.
Listening Fully

*What if …*

You could meet with someone who has respect for your spiritual needs, who cares about your distress, who is a part of your church community, and would hold your situation in strict confidence?

*What if …*

You could explain everything to someone who wants to hear the whole thing all the way through, the entire range of your experience, and you could finish your thoughts without interruption?

*What if …*

You didn’t have to hear about how so and so handled it such and such a way, or get any other well-intentioned but sometimes irrelevant advice?

*What if …*

You had compassion support and the time to talk completely through the issue?

~~~ Would it help you sort it all out?

**Active Listening**

Try to follow another’s thoughts and learn to listen deeply. Let the person choose where they want to start. Communicate that you respect and acknowledge their ability to start anywhere they want and however they want to express themselves. Be aware of contradictions between words and body language.

- “Where do you want to start?”
- “Can you tell me what’s going on in your life?”
- “Tell me more about what’s going on for you.”

**Ways you can let a person know you are with them:**

- Restate or paraphrase what they have said.
• Reflect on what they have said, e.g. “I’m thinking this is a scary time for you…”
• “I may have cut you off, did you want to say more?”
• Questions should elicit more of their story.
  “What happened then…” “Tell me more about your father…”
• OK to share feeling – “I’m sorry.” “How are you handling this?” “Wow that sounds really hard…”

• Be comfortable with tears. But, don’t hand tissues to someone who is crying. Have tissues available.
• Clarify what you have heard. “It sounds like you are dealing with a difficult…” “What’s the hardest part of this?” “Is there anything else?”
• “Tell me a little more.” “I think I understand – is it that you’re afraid to _______?” “I wonder if that’s embarrassing.” Frightening, etc.

**Things to Avoid - Do’s and Don’ts:**
• Not your time to share your story.
• Talking too much – feeling like you have to fill the silence.
• OK to have silence. Can even address that it’s OK. However, there is an art to discerning when it’s good to have silence and when it might seem unhelpful.
• Don’t be the one that changes the subject.
• False reassurance. Instead: “I’m scared.” -- “Yes, I’ll bet you’re scared.”
• Avoid platitudes, such as, “Everything happens for a reason.” or “God never gives us more than we can handle.”
• Don’t use evaluative words. e.g. “It sounds like she is a creep.” Avoid making statements that may be judgmental.
• When asked, “What should I do?” Associate possible responses:
  o “What is the first thing you think you should do?”
  o “What are your options?”
  o “What do you want to do?”
  o “What has been helpful to you in the past?”
• We have no idea why things happen; we have no answers.
• Do not argue with a person to try and change their point of view. You may not agree with them, but they have the right to their point of view.

Companioning: A Ministry of Presence
• Put everything aside before you begin visits so you are fully present to your congregants.
• Stand WITH your congregants as they struggle with challenges so that they know they are not alone.
• Convey unconditional positive regard, empathy, compassion, assurance, affirmation, understanding, and acceptance.
• Talk about the feelings and the process of wrestling with the challenge. Resist the temptation to fix or cure the problem.
• Assist them in identifying community resources that may be helpful.
• Create a space in which congregants can acknowledge the multiple feelings they may have about their issues.
• Don’t rush the process; progress will happen when the time is right.
• Part of being caring is being honest; there may be times when you’ll want to reflect to your congregants your concerns about ideas they may have.
• Be dependable. Keep appointments and confidentiality

~~~ It’s an honor to be part of such a personal, in-depth exploration.

Being a Caring Presence
The main focus of a Caring Visitor relationship is to help the receiver get to know themselves more fully. Think about a time you were well listened to. What made you feel safe? What were the qualities of that person that made them a good listener? • Eye contact • Body posture • Nodding • Not being distracted • Not interrupting • Non-judgmental attitude
Preparing to be Present Physically & Spiritually

- Set up a time that is good for both people.
- Ideally, meet at church or congregant’s home – not a busy coffee shop. Space is important.
- Before you go, find your inner space. Meditate. Empty your mind and make yourself fully present.
- Be ready to listen with eyes, ears, mind, heart and intuition.
- Make yourself index cards to prepare for visit - little reminders.
- It’s not about us. It’s about the spirit of love to be with this person.
- Trust the congregant’s inner capacity to know themselves and also to uncover what they may need to do.
- You don’t need to solve their problem, just accompany them.
- You may cry with them, but be aware there’s difference between crying with empathy and now becoming one who need to be taken care of.
- You are not alone, but part of a team of other Caring Visitors and ministers.

Why Might Congregants Need a Caring Visitor?
We all face life challenges that may lead us to feel very alone and overwhelmed, and/or demand great contemplation. Some stress is normal, but too much, too concentrated, can cause have devastating effects and can lead to increased illnesses or accidents. A feeling of being overwhelmed and seeing no resolution can lead to situational or clinical depression. A Caring Visitor offers a listening presence in a relationship centered on care receivers feeling heard. She/he provides emotional support with the purpose that the receiver no longer feels alone and overwhelmed.
The “Top 15 Life Change Stressors” listed below provide some circumstances that may warrant Pastoral Care. **Isolation is not specifically in the stressor list, but can arise out of many of the events listed.** Other issues come to the Ministers directly.

**Top 15 Life Change Stressors**

1. Death of a child
2. Death of a spouse
3. Death of a parent or sibling
4. Divorce
5. Separation from spouse due to work or marital problems
6. Being held in jail
7. Serious injury or illness
8. Loss of a job
9. Death of a close friend
10. Pregnancy
11. Birth or adoption of a child
12. Miscarriage
13. Major business readjustment
14. Parent’s divorce
15. Relative moving in with you

From Dr. Richard Rahe’s *Life Change Stress Test*
How to Reach Congregants who are Difficult to Reach

- Mention that you bring greetings from the congregation
- Read the church newsletter
- Read selections (lyrics, responsive readings) from hymnals
- Play a recording of Sunday service
- Bring a chalice to touch, hold, see, and light
- Show photos from daily life in prior decades when congregant was younger
- Bring a fruit or vegetable to see, touch, and eat
- Bring a seasonal nature item to see, touch, hold
- Read to the congregant from his or her library
- Show the congregant photos from his or her photo albums
- Bring something pleasing to touch
- Take congregants around their living quarters so they can give a tour and describe their belongings and the stories that go with them. Help them touch items they may not normally be able to reach
- Bring recordings of UU hymns to hear and sing along with
- Bring in art object for the congregant to see, touch, hold
- Show congregant church membership directory photographs from a range of years during the congregants membership
- Your loving, caring presence and tone of voice will be received probably more than you can tell.
Resources used in creating this Caring Visitor Program Guide
“Lay Pastoral Care Program Guide” from the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond, VA.

Group Training presented at JUC by Rev. Jean Pupke and Carol Wayne of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond, VA, September 2012.

Lay Pastoral Ministry Series – Webinars 1, 2 & 3 facilitated by Rev. Peg Boyle and Rev. Lois Van Leer of the UUA Pacific West Region, on October 23; November 14; December 18, 2014.