

What I'd Like to Tell My Church About Ministering to People with Chronic Illness

Living with chronic illness is lonely. Everyone around us seems to be enjoying health, happiness and the ability to pursue their dreams without physical limitations. But we are lonely, scared, disappointed. We are facing living with an illness that we have not been able to pray away, cry away, or confess away and so we turn to you for guidance and acceptance.

We aren't sure why we haven't been healed, but we realize that God still has a plan for our lives. And we want to find it and begin to live it. We want to share the gifts that we have been given. We want to put some of our new-found wisdom, through our experience, into action! We want to encourage others who we know are hurting like ourselves. We want to reach out to others and cry with them and ask them how we can pray.

This is our story. This is our desire. We hope our churches will listen and make us a part of their family.

"...those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor... But God has combined the members of the body and has given

greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it," (1 Corinthians 12:23-27).

What I can definitely say about the help and encouragement I have received from Rest Ministries is the fact that the very ones who are encouraging me to trust God, stay in His word and lift my needs before the Lord are those who have and are experiencing physical, emotional and spiritual pain. This somehow increases my desire to look to the Lord more so than when someone who has never experienced physical, emotional or spiritual pain says the same thing. I guess what we need from the community of people who do not have chronic illness or pain is empathy so that we feel accepted and loved "unconditionally." The ministry seems to come from those who have been wounded and are giving back out of a deep understanding of what that feels like instead of having that same advice received like it is a formula to spiritual wholeness.

So, I guess what I'm really saying is that it would be good if churches could develop a ministry of equipping the wounded to minister to other wounded children of God. This would help those with chronic illness/pain to cast away their feelings of worthlessness and draw them out of isolation.

Pam

My health has deteriorated this year, but I hope to start a HopeKeepers group next year at my church for the chronically ill. Those of us who are ill have a lot we can teach about coping with life's problems. We also need our congregations to A-S-K U-S what we need. Our needs change from month-to-month and day-to-day. Often, our families, who are over-loaded with their jobs plus ours, do not have a clue as to what would help us emotionally!

*Louise
Disabled eleven years with
chronic fatigue syndrome*

Overcoming is not a physical thing we are called upon to do by the Lord, but a spiritual exercise on a daily basis. The body of believers has come to believe that overcoming is an action on their part to show up at church, to overcome wanting to stay in bed to rest. For a chronic pain patient, it is being able to take that first step out of bed each day. The Lord will meet us where *we are*, and not where our fellow church members think that we should be. It is difficult for those who believe in healings to sit each day and wonder why we have been left behind.

In our overcoming we find the spirit buried deep inside of us, and we find the truest blessings in our lives. We may not have the energy or capacity to rise on Sunday morning and put on our Sunday best to attend a service in a chapel, but we do have the Lord meeting us where we are. We do rise each Sunday, as other believers, but our spirit is what shines through - not our new clothes. When we, as believers,

can stop the judgment of one another and decide to look at the hearts of our fellow believers, then and only then will chronic pain be understood. When we believers can take a stand to look on the heart and know that the Lord will meet us where we are - even in chronic pain - then we will have wondrous fellowship. Realize that the one's who are unable to attend your services may have the most faithful following, as it is a daily routine in spirit and life.

The body of Christ looks upon those who are in physical pain as having a lack of faith, a sin in their life or an underlying generational curse, and the fact is that they are looked upon as less than the 'healthy' body. Look upon their hearts, dear believers; see what is in their spirits. Find in you the strength that they walk through each day of their life, if you can. If you had to live in constant physical oppression, would you have the spiritual life you have now? No, I think not, but I can tell you that it would be better by far.

Diana

I don't know if our church has any kind of specific ministry for the chronically ill but they do believe in prayer and healing and have prayed for both my husband (Cystic Fibrosis and RA) and myself (fibromyalgia syndrome). I have just recently discovered your ministry in an attempt to answer my own questions.

Feeling isolated from the church and not comfortable enough to step forward and ask them I began searching on the internet. Since I have just been ill for two years (my husband 8) and married for 5 years everything is relatively new to me. I

have many unanswered questions and I wonder will God heal us in this lifetime? I know that He is the Great Physician, but will our healing manifest in this lifetime? Nobody knows but Him. So where or how does He get glory from us being so ill that we can hardly get through our daily routines? And is that all to our lives? These unanswered questions along with not always being able to attend church and feeling isolated from everything certainly has made me feel hopeless at times. But with a renewed commitment to serving God no matter what and letting Him worry about our lives counting for the kingdom I am determined to find, like you, a purpose for my life. I have only received two of your devotionals so far and have received so much encouragement knowing that people like us are writing these and that they totally understand our situation. Before my illness I thought I had understanding of my husband and his condition, but now that I am stricken I truly understand.

My church has not reached out to me other than to pray when we step forward. Perhaps it is our responsibility to educate them since as I said one couldn't truly understand unless one has lived through it. Rest Ministries has helped because it is people with similar situations helping each other. They truly understand and perhaps they don't have all the answers but we can share our grief and encourage each other to *stand*.

Gina

Thank God for this ministry that has so helped me understand what's happening to me. My church elders have not even

prayed for me. They don't understand I am not getting better. They often misunderstand me; I've been called unaccountable (due to missing functions from pain) etc.

I am praying to get the literature so I can inform them there are people who don't get better. It's not negative to realize your capabilities. This ministry has kept me sane. I realize God can still use a broken old-boned person as myself. I feel like I could die any day; it's hard to live in this type of fear but with Rest Ministries I feel I can go on. I love reading the e-mail every morning to refresh and encourage me. Thank you so much.

Patricia

This is Lynn, from "A Legacy Of Hope - Cancer Support and Encouragement." I wanted to share just a bit about my own family's experience. When my mother was dying with lung cancer, she had recently moved back to our hope town. The church we had attended years before was where she had wanted to go when she moved back - but she fell ill and never got to go. SO when she was dying, here we were, faced with no pastor in a time of great need. We didn't know this young man now pastoring our old church, but I called anyway. He was very kind and compassionate and he told me he would come right over, which he did. When he arrived, in his hand was a small, thin Bible and in his other hand was a loaf of homemade bread that his wife had sent along with him that we might nibble on in the hospital. I was touched by that small act of compassion - for someone they had never laid eyes on.

The scene he walked in to: My mother was in a lot of pain and the pain meds served only to knock her out, into a restless sleep. Every time she stirred, the pain was immediately revived. So this was the scene he walked into: a 51-year-old lady he'd never met, who was in pain, and dying, surrounded by her three helpless, frightened, grown but "mama's baby" kids! :-)

We were in our 20's and early 30's at the time. Our daddy left us when we were young, so our Mom had been everything to us. She was the rock in our lives.

His approach, sizing up that scene and knowing what was needed: He talked slowly, gently; his voice was filled with compassion, which immediately eased my heart. After speaking to her briefly, he told her simply that he was 'so and so', current pastor from her old church, and that he was very sorry that she was hurting. And if she didn't mind, he would sit with her, and read for a bit from the Psalms. She weakly nodded her head at him. So he smiled, gently stroked her hand, and then sat down. He opened his Bible to the first Psalm. He began to softly read. And he sat for two hours and read through the book of Psalms, selecting appropriate verses that would give strength and comfort and encouragement. He never stopped reading - it just flowed with such ease and I noticed several things.

1. Her breathing, which had been labored, now was even, easy and rhythmic.
2. She seemed more peaceful
3. The expression on her face told me that her pain was eased (frown, burrowed brow, etc. were gone).

4. *My own* tension and fear and uptight spirit had also eased and I too, felt more peaceful.

It's hard to explain, but he was *unobtrusive*, his visit did not bring tension. He did not thunder into the room and speak meaningless babble to strangers. He simply sized up this situation, and called upon God to ease it. It really was like God Himself was in there, speaking those words. The young pastor faded into the background. I simply heard the soothing voice of comfort, hope, expectation, and encouragement. I think he read until God told him that was enough. Then he gently looked at my Mother, asleep now... and said, "I'll be back. Rest easy." Twice more we called him that week - and he came, one of those trips was at 2 in the morning! He again slipped into a quiet, dark room where only muffled sobs could be heard, and labored "death rattle breathing." The nurse had gathered us and told us she appeared to be dying.

Again, he eased into the room, like a gentle breeze, unobtrusive - slipped over behind us as we stood at her bed, and began softly reading those Psalms. I could feel the tension begin to melt away. By 5:30 are, after some three hours of reading. She was breathing easily and more steady, and we were all considerably calmer! He left us as the sun was rising in the hospital window. Two days later we would call again, and it would not be a false alarm that time.

I shared all this with you, so that maybe you could convey to pastors, that in

times like this, a quiet, compassionate, gentle spirit eases fear, anxiety and pain.

The words of a man may agitate, but the words breathed by God's Holy Spirit seem to calm, settle, ease, and slow or decrease pain. This man was sensitive to our needs, her needs, and he responded not with "empty words" but with words that truly comforted! He did not rattle off empty platitudes, or speak unnecessary words out of his own nervousness - he simply cared!

I would encourage a pastor to *not* have a preplanned "approach" to one in pain and dying- you know what I mean? Don't go in with a rehearsed line! Go in, asking God to help you see what the need is, in that time and place. I believe God will answer that request and give him the words, the touch, the countenance that soothes and eases better than any narcotic!

I would say the same for visiting those who are not dying, but living with chronic ongoing pain. GO in with this same attitude. I have spoken with a lady who tells me she is never pain-free except when she is in the presence of a particular pastor who obviously has these wonderful qualities! When he comes, the pain seems to magically be soothed away! Yet I have heard others say they became very agitated even at the sight of the pastor!

Because his words seemed empty and rehearsed, and his heart did not seem to genuinely care - it increased their anxiety and therefore, their pain! The mind and heart/ spirit are amazing! By the way, when I go to the pages of Rest Ministries . . . I sense that same gentle breeze, coming in softly, sincerely, unobtrusively, and with

soothing, real words of comfort, that release the tension and anxiety, and ease pain. Thank you for hearing His voice and obeying it.

Lynn <{*}>

As my pain grew worse and worse over time I realized that I could not do all that I wanted to do and had been doing by way of ministry. I am the pastor's wife and experienced intense pain from, what I would later find out to be fibromyalgia. It was very difficult for me to admit to the people in our congregation that it was physically necessary for me to relieve myself of certain duties. I appeared fine. I did miss church periodically but most of the time I tried to go no matter how I felt. As time went on I decided to give up the areas of ministry. I quit teaching. I quit singing in the choir. I quit being the secretary. I stood up in a service and, by way of testimony, explained my situation. The people were very supportive. Because my husband is the pastor, of course, I had his total support. The people did not look down on me because I was withdrawing myself from ministry. We all know that in a church there are a very small handful of people who actually do the work. But our people were encouraged to get behind me and hold me up.

My pastor husband made sure that he gave them all regular updates on my progress. It was important to me that he validates my illness and supports my decisions. It is difficult when someone steps down from ministry in order to attend to the physical needs of their bodies. But

God has told us that this is his Temple and we are to take care of it. Interestingly, God sent new families to our church during my time of hiatus from ministry. My husband was very influential in plugging them into the vacant ministries. Because he supported me and my decision to remove myself, others were given the opportunity to serve the Lord. I hope that you can use this in any way possible to help another individual who feels the pressure of serving God when in constant chronic pain. I have been able to focus on my relationship with the Lord more through this time. *Pamela*

I'd share two things: (1) have to say that because of my illness (or more likely my hypersensitivity) I haven't found a home church. Every time we have gone to church and we have gone for prayer and I have sought out help, people keep telling me one of two things: "Patty, by His Stripes, You are healed... You must have faith; if you have faith then you will be healed," or "You must not be praying hard enough." I can't tell you how much that hurts, and how I keep feeling like a failure when I am told that.

Secondly, Rest Ministries has helped me so very much. I don't feel like I am alone in my Christian Community anymore. I know that there are brothers and sisters in the Lord that understand what I am going through and that we all come together in prayer and support and that each person does not profess to have the answers... just a lot of love, support and faith and prayer to our Heavenly Father. I know that I will be healed someday... either here on earth or in Heaven...that God will

heal me... in His time, but until then, Rest Ministries is invaluable to me, and I am so very grateful you and all the volunteers have followed the Lord's bidding to do this work!

Patty

I belong to a church that I used to love, but now I am not sure what to think. It is very difficult for me to get to church due to the fact that the services are about three hours long and I have problems sitting for long periods of time. I either have to choose between the praise and worship or the sermon when I do get to go. No one ever calls or checks to see why I am not there and I used to be one of their Sunday school teachers. It is a nondenominational, charismatic type church and I think they have a problem with the fact that I am one of those that have not been healed. The only ones who ever check on me are my friends that also have chronic illness and my very closest friend. The three of us who have chronic debilitating illnesses check on one another but it is seldom that anyone else from the church ever calls. It would be nice if once in a while someone would call and say "I have been missing you at church." It is hurtful to think about and I wish people would not be afraid to call and at least let me know that they care. The senior pastor does call occasionally but he has so many other obligations, I think perhaps this is something that could be handled by others in the church.

Doris

Rest Ministries has given me a Christian subject matter when I am too sick to get out

of the house for face-to-face church. Churches, more than two-thirds that I have been involved with, ask me to show up for Bible study, this committee and that committee, go out and witness and bring people in, when I am too sick - they expect me to be well. A Pastor's Wife and a Rest Ministries devotee,

Jeanne

I feel that my church has not really taken an interest in my personal situation. I must briefly share my situation that you might understand where I am coming from. Much of this will apply to my husband, mother as well as myself. Ten years ago I became a caregiver for my mother with Alzheimer's. She lived a good life here for almost seven years when, of necessity, I put her in a nursing home for 24 hr. care that I could not provide. Several years after mother came my husband had a series of cardiac arrests resulting in brain damage and some memory loss. For much of the time I was caring for two who needed a variety of help. We have been at the church for nearly twenty years, my husband was pastor for seven years, and we had another assignment and returned to the church family we had known. I shared with closest friends and the pastor exactly what I was dealing with and now realize that in doing so we were excluded from much of the program... On Sunday mornings we get very warm greetings and small talk, but that is about it I have asked for some men to visit my husband and occasionally invite him to a church meeting, etc. So far, this has not happened.

My own personal needs have been secondary to those of my mother and husband. I guess that a lot of my difficulties are easy for others to overlook. The Lord has truly been my refuge and strength. I attend those activities that have meaning to me personally, such as a study on worship, etc. I attend a Bible study at another church when a friend invited me several yrs. ago because they offered a nursery for toddlers and I am also caregiver for my granddaughter and could not go without this service being offered. Our biggest need has been for visits, calls, occasional transportation to medical appointments and so forth. I finally had to realize that I would have to build my own support system and most of this has been outside my own church and I think things should not be that way in the body of Christ. Because of my husband changing churches is totally out of the question at this time, as he feels that he really belongs there and I can understand that and support him in this.

When I saw the notice about a HopeKeepers group starting up I was the only who had any interest, so I have been active since our start up. I have been so blessed by HK and RM. The Christian setting and genuine caring friends has made a real difference in my life--and has provided many opportunities for me to reach out to others in need in meaningful ways, calls, e-mails, notes of encouragement, prayer ministry, friendship and fellowship, chartroom, daily devotionals which I pass on to others, the opportunity to serve as an encourager...these are all very important to me...and I realize that

there are so many others in much more difficult situations and I am indeed grateful to be able to give of myself to others. There are many programs I would like to see in my church...support groups for caregivers, more attentive care to the disabled, healing services, to name a few. I don't know if this is the type of information you wanted But I did feel that I should share from my personal experience. The Lord has used all of this to give me great feeling for the needs of others and a desire to extend myself to help others everywhere I go--and such a love for those who suffer...

I am so grateful for Rest Ministries and the supportive ministry of caring, encouraging others. God bless you always and in every way. He is sooo good!

Nancy

Anyone out there been smothered by anxious "care-givers" from a church? Some of us simply want to rest confidently in the Lord and rely on Him for provision during long periods of ill health. I wanted rest, calm and privacy, not to be cut off from kindly connection with people, but not to have knocks on my door at all hours of the day and night, either!

Before and after surgery, I lacked the energy to fend off those who were determined to "make it all better." I could recommend my over-programmed church in Irvine to those who THINK they want more visitors, but that's not practical. Pastors want to help find a middle road, because intrusion isn't a blessing either. Obviously there's a balance needed. First step has to be listening. That's the best, but most time-consuming ministry of all. Perhaps

listening plus a questionnaire that gave the blessing of *choice* to the one who is ill. Want visitors? Want meals? Want your concerns to be on the prayer chain? Want a phone call from a lay caregiver once a week? Want someone to come by, take you to church, what would be a help to *you*? When people are weak and ill and have no choice about many things, it is a supreme blessing to be treated with respect and offered choice. Caring without listening and respect feels more like smothering. Why is that so hard to understand for those who want to show they "care"?

"Ackker-people"

Churches should be encouraged to develop a Stephens Ministry in their churches and a Parish Nurse(s).

Janice

I have had chronic fatigue syndrome for fifteen years and through many moves to different churches, I've had very different experiences. There is such a delicate balance between the two teachings of 1. Believing, standing for your healing, and not confessing anything negative. 2. And compassion and love through the process of healing.

I think some pastors feel if they have a parishioner who is chronically ill that they have not done their job well enough. I believe they are even afraid to bring up and address chronic illness or illnesses that are complicated in nature. I also, however, do admire a pastor who has a gift of healing but that also has taken the time to research and learn how the body works and how illnesses affect the body in

specifics and also how it affects the individual on a spiritual and emotional basis. I would plead to pastors: "Don't isolate us anymore, please! Our outward bodies might be suffering but our spirits are *strong*," and we are being used by God in *mighty ways*!

Marcia

I live in Texas and I live with fibromyalgia, myofascial pain syndrome complex, spastic cystoneia, and disc disease of the lower back. So I am in pain a great deal of the time, have had to dramatically reduce my day-to-day activities and frequently suffer from depression, etc. I think the greatest thing my pastor has done for me is to show me how much he loves me. He always has a hug for me and an expression of his interest in my well-being. His wife always asks about how I am feeling each time I see her. And my friends at church readily offer to drive me to doctor appointments, etc. (without my having to ask). And someone always stops right on the spot and asks to pray for me when they can tell I am hurting. I know without uncertainty that I can call on any one of them at any time for anything. So in summation, what I am trying to convey is an attitude. I am made to feel loved and cared for at all times by the attitudes of my pastor and fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. I am never made to feel that I am "a pain in the neck" or a bother. I can always sense a "positive" attitude toward others and myself who may be "hurting." So, in return, that has made me more sensitive about my attitude toward the problems of others, and how I react to them. What a

ministry - to be able to love the hurting and downtrodden in the midst of your own life's trials!

Bibby

I think the main problem in the church and the reason for the lack of empathy in many cases is the instant "microwave" society in which we live. Everything has to be done *now*, if not, *yesterday*! There it is: the world successfully evangelizing the church again!!! So when we come to God WE tell *Him* what *we* (think we) need, how it should be done and when it should be done. Also we lose track of the fact that there are many benefits to be attained through "suffering as HE did" so that HE may be glorified through us!

Suffering also has the potential to bring us so intimately close to the heart of the Father but at the same time not understanding the ways of God can cause us to become bitter and draw us away from God the Father. Whenever we think, "Why me? Why isn't God healing me?" we should think of Job, maybe do a study of all the things he lost but more importantly, all the things that were gained as a result of his suffering. The most important factor in all of this is that God does love us and He is sovereign. There is nothing that we can do to make Him love us more and there is nothing that we can do to force Him to heal us right now!

We can hurl ourselves onto the floor and throw a 2-year-old tantrum but *God is good!* I've worked that one out!! Aren't I smart? I have faced many afflictions in my twelve years as a Christian and have had to

watch my now 18-year-old son suffer all his life as a result of ADHD and childhood Schizophrenia and now Paranoid Schizophrenia. *Life isn't fair! That's right, life isn't fair, but we have a better world a comin' and it's not too far away. I sincerely believe that some of us have to wait until heaven for the "ultimate healing."*

Now some would accuse me of having a 'lack of faith' for that statement, but that is the reality. What we need from the church is support by just acknowledging our feelings and what we're going through but also practical help when it is really needed. There are so many unemployed people in the church who are just wasting their life away, quite frankly many of them don't feel they have a purpose for getting out of bed each morning, that's a very sad place to be! Wouldn't they find purpose in helping the chronically ill in the church and maybe we could see the body of Christ functioning as the Body of Christ. I would also like a dollar for every time some well meaning Christian has come up and laid hands on my son and prayed for him to be healed and said to me, "there you are! I think you'll see a change from now on in your son, since I've prayed like that!" Don't they realize that we have prayed night and day with tears, groanings, deep intercession, etc, and its not our fault if we are not healed straight away, we haven't got a magic formula, or magic wand to just take things away if we did *we'd certainly use it! Wouldn't we?*

Karen

The need I have found in my own church was covered in one of your devotionals recently. When you can't 'see' the illness, how can anything be wrong? To many, this is a real truth, yet, when you try to tell them they don't listen. Then, I think the toughest thing for me is those who feel and say, (yes, even pastors!) "Well, if you aren't healed, then you lack faith." I have been sending my pastors your devotionals and am really changing opinions. Thank you.

Carol

I have not been able to attend church because of my mental instability. I have panic attacks. My dad pastors the church and he is semi-retired and does this not for the money but to be useful of the Lord. He is 73 and does carpentry work on the side. The church is very small but the people there are caring and understanding of my illnesses. Their way of support is prayer, sending me email letters, and during the holidays surprising me with wonderful things.

What I am about to say is unfortunate but true nonetheless. We have foreign missionaries in many countries and churches will send doctors, dentist, psychiatric professionals, etc., to them but we don't have that here in our work for the churches in the USA. I know many people who could benefit but I don't see it happening and I am unable to do it but one never knows what the Lord has in store.

Anne-Marie

There really needs to be a ministry devoted entirely to helping others: the ones who take meals to the woman who just had

a baby or rides to doctor appointments for the elderly. What about helping me out by seeing past the "you look fine, so you must feel fine" mentality. I could really use someone to go with me to an occasional doctor appointment (yes, I drive and am able, but the hours I spend in waiting rooms is a real downer week after week). I would love it if someone could do some things that I wish I could do, but can't anymore...like scrub a tub or vacuum my house. And the thought of a night off of cooking dinner is pure luxury! But don't forget the most important thing of all...please, please keep me in your prayers.

Bridget

I have really enjoyed Rest Ministries. I am a 55-year-old retired Teacher's Aide. I worked for 25 years with the McDowell Co. Board of Education. Four years ago, at work, I slipped on a wet floor injuring my spine. Even though I went through physical therapy and rehabilitation, I was unable to continue working. This was very devastating. In the months following the accident, I learned to rely on my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for comfort. Not only was I unable to work, but my husband was also disabled and this caused a greater stress.

I can understand my non-Christian friends thinking that maybe I was not injured as much as I was, but it was hard for me to deal with some of the remarks from my friends. "I'll bet you've got all of your spring cleaning done." No, I'm off from work because I'm hurt and can't work! Or this one I loved, "You sure are lucky to get to retire early." My heart was grieved the

most because my church family didn't visit and the telephone calls were few. My husband and I have always done a lot of work within the church. I play the piano or organ, sing, teach, help with dinners and always tried to be available when needed to fill in whenever there was a need. I consider my husband and me to be mature Christians and we do not have petty feelings.

This is what I would like for you to tell the pastors and church leaders: when a member of your church family is sick, injured or hurting, don't just tell them your praying for them. Come hold their hand and pray WITH them. Don't tell them how much you miss them, have some of the children MAKE a get well or miss you card. Don't ask if there's anything you can do, come prepared to do!

Don't ask if there is a financial need, think of the expenses you have in your household and if they don't have an income there has to be a need. Bless them and your church by returning some of their tithes and offerings to them. Don't think that because they aren't complaining they aren't hurting. Don't tell them to "give their problems to God." Take that person and their problems in your hands and hold them up before God. Into everyone's life there will fall some rain. You never know when you will need someone to hold an umbrella for you.

Wanda Belcher

My pastor and some close friends have offered empathy. They have added a ramp in front for wheelchair bound, although bathrooms are still not accessible. I think

they probably aren't aware of all I go through because they don't ask and I don't tell. However, because of my illness I take an effort to reach out to others in the church that I am aware of who have chronic pain and illness.

Seldom does anyone volunteer to help, or ask if any help is needed. Occasional housecleaning or a meal are simple and would help so much. Or an offer to write Christmas cards and/or wrap gifts. My church is great in assisting during crisis situations such as surgeries, deaths in family, new babies, acute illnesses, etc. They most always provide meals, babysitting, etc. And that is important. But those of us who struggle every day too often go unnoticed... they get used to us. An example...I recently had to leave the choir due to my increasing deafness and inability to hear the part. People are used to my hearing difficulties. I've sung in that choir for over twenty years. I think three people mentioned their regrets at my needing to step down. I'm not looking for sympathy, just noting that since I'm not dying of cancer of the vocal cords, life goes on. This has actually been a positive force in my reaching out to others... I don't want them to be passed by or unnoticed.

It has been such an encouragement to me to hear about others' suffering and to see how they snatch opportunities to do what they can through Rest Ministries—to see how they use as many of their strengths as they can, rather than empathizing the negatives. I'm learning to look outside myself again, and encourage others. I also use these examples in my own life, especially when the pain is especially bad

and I want to focus inward. My limited involvement with Rest Ministries has brought renewal to my life.

Name withheld

I am 25; I have fibromyalgia and chemical sensitivities. My husband is a worship pastor and ministry can be demanding on a healthy person, never mind being ill. This past year God has been teaching me that what I do does not make me who I am. This is a hard lesson since there are many needs; many things I love to do, but cannot.

Rest Ministries has been so encouraging. I receive the daily devotionals and they have really helped me to focus and to be thankful. I wish I could be involved more with Rest Ministries, but at this point I don't think I can.

Church friends and leaders have always been supportive of my illness. It is very hard for most healthy people to understand, but they are always concerned. It has been hard though at times. Last year I could not get out of bed for fifteen days. I needed friends, a meal, just someone to come and sit by my bed and talk. People knew and two came, my mom and one person for fifteen minutes. That was hard, but I think some might have been afraid, not sure, I don't know. Another thing that has been a struggle for me is Prayer People. We have a prayer team at church and many people have asked to pray for me. They do and then the relationship gets awkward. I am not healed and they keep asking. Do I not have enough faith? I feel God has asked for me to be patient, to persevere and if he heals me when I get to heaven and not

here on earth it will be worth it. Maybe it is a communication problem. I am not always the best at saying things clearly, but this has been a struggle for me for many years and at times I want to avoid people praying for me.

God has taught me so much through sickness and has used me to help others in pain and being able to help others gives me joy, lifts depression and has taught more about myself. I don't understand it, but I know I love God and he loves me just the way I am.

Melony

I've been blessed with a supportive, caring small church family. Here's some of my experience.

Things I find very helpful if my Pastor / elders do:

- Mention me by name in public prayer during regular worship services (not necessarily every week but regularly)
- Make regular visits to read Scripture to me and pray with me
- Offer counseling, accountability -I need encouragement to continue on, exhortation as to how to deal w. my illness in order to most glorify God, rebuke when necessary and help to examine my life for sin that may be contributing to my suffering, also accountability for my devotional, prayer and meditation (which can also come from an older woman in the church)
- Find out our abilities, gifts, and strengths and help find ways for us

to use these within the Church and/or elsewhere.

Everyone

- Pray for me regularly at home and tell me periodically if they are. I am especially touched and encouraged when a mother will tell me that her 8-year-old son is praying for me faithfully every night and has been for years! Also when a godly, elderly person who is struggling with ailing health herself tells me she is holding me before the Throne of Grace. The prayers of faith offered in a continuing, regular manner are very precious to me and accomplishes much, as the Bible says.
- Send an occasional card, poem, scripture to encourage One Christmas after a particularly hard month, the ladies in my church got together to make up a care basket with all kinds of little treats and tokens of their love. Especially appreciated was the fact that they tried to give me things that I could eat or enjoy, not just the typical chocolate etc which I can't have.
- Find out limitations, hindrances to participation. Ask "What barriers, hindrances are there that prevent you from coming to church, worshipping with us, participating fully?" or "What can we do to help you to be able to participate more fully in church life?"
- Ask how you can help me practically and offer some suggestions of what you could do such as: rides to

doctors, doing shopping, baking or housecleaning

- Invite me to activities even if I probably can't attend and when inviting, give as much details re the proceedings, program, length, environment etc as they can
- Show a consideration and willingness to adjust things to make it easier for me to attend (i.e. since I'm chemically sensitive, refrain from wearing perfume, after-shave and other fragrances...)
- Be supportive, take me seriously, not down-playing my illness and yet not drawing too much attention to it either-suggest / lend helpful tapes, books and articles that help me keep my eyes focused on God

Things that are *not* helpful:

- When people who don't really know what they are talking about, or if they do, they don't know my particular condition, problems... giving advice as to medical treatment, life style.... (for example, "you're just too thin -should eat more", or "just get out and exercise, got to push your self more...") which may be fine advice for some people, but generally not for the chronically ill.
- Comments such as: Is there nothing doctors can do for you? Can't they find anything? How come nothing helps? Why aren't you getting better? But you look so good.

- Planning socials and dinners without consulting me or considering my food allergies.... Of course it is also my responsibility to find out what is being served beforehand so I can know what I can safely eat or take my own food if necessary or stay home.

Rest Ministries *helps* focus on encouraging others and improves my outlook on living with illness/pain:

- Hear from others how they do it
- Realize there are people who I can help
- Provides an avenue to reach out to others struggling with the same sorts of issues

Marguerite

I would like to share my story in hopes that it will lead to positive action. I have been living with multiple chemical sensitivity for two years, homebound for most of that time. For the most part, my church family seems to have forgotten me. There is an occasional phone call or card. And there are a few church friends I feel comfortable calling on. One thing that really hurts is that neither the pastor or his wife have ever called me or sent me a card. I can understand people's hesitation to visit as I react to so many things. Yet, they have no idea how much phone calls and letters mean to someone in my situation. I try so hard to be positive. I realize people lead very busy lives, and I try to understand and accept that they have many demands on their time. I hope and pray that churches will become more aware of the need to unite

and strengthen the Body, including the weaker members.

Diane

I've had both positive and negative responses to my illness from church members/pastors. Four years ago I had heart surgery for lupus and afterward the congregation I was with then responded beautifully with meals brought to my home and on one occasion, a couple of women from the church came to my apartment and not only put back furniture after a new kitchen floor had been installed, but also cleaned the apartment! However, that was sort of the beginning of a very bad year medically. I was in and out of the hospital and ER twelve-plus times. Because my family lives forty-five minutes away from me, I would call the church to provide me with a ride home from the hospital or ER (the times I had to call 911 and was taken there by medics); the first couple of times they were happy to help out. After that, I got a call from the pastor, who said, "you can't keep expecting us to pick you up on the spot. You at least need to call us a day or so ahead of time, and we would be happy to pick you up." I thought, *Sure, I ALWAYS know two days in advance that I am going to have to call 911.*

I am in a Christian singles group and they have been wonderful in understanding that I don't always feel so great. They also have offered financial help when we go on outings that cost some money. They have told me to never let my financial situation (because of being on disability) come between my going with them anywhere. I think all churches

should follow their example. The church I am attending now charges exorbitant (at least for someone on disability!) fees for things like the Christmas party, etc. I admit I have not talked to them about this, but after receiving your e-mail about this, maybe I will! I'm sure there must be others in the congregation who don't have a lot of money, either.

Laurie

I feel bad that I don't have any positive stories to share. But one thing that really made it difficult for me was when I was homebound and was a member of a small church (90-100). They were very aware of when I did not come for months on end, and I *never* heard from any of them for fourteen months. The pastor called occasionally, but *no one else* did. A group (led by the pastor) came and caroled at my home for Christmas two years in a row. But I never saw them any other time. Or even got any phone calls from them unless they wanted to tell me about their illness. I guess people assume I've not been sick enough for special attention in my new church. It is much bigger (3000), but the response seems to be the same. Usually when I tell them about my situation, they pray for me. That's okay, but it seems there should be more. I've been helped financially, but not in connection with my illness.

Diane

I have found that people avoid me because they are overwhelmed by the amount of suffering I experience. I always smile and help out, but they know I'm

hurting and they say they feel guilty that they complain when they see me going on somewhat happily despite the pain. I feel alone just the same--whether they avoid me for handling it well or if they were to avoid me had I complained too much. So I just stay away now.

Susan

My church does reach out to their chronically ill, but many others do not. I have fibromyalgia and receive your daily devotionals. A friend of mine has an undefined muscle disease that has left her in a wheel chair. It is her story that I want to relate to you.

Within two weeks of accepting Christ as her personal savior Cathy was struck with some undefined muscle disorder. For three years she only left her bed for doctor's appointment. She was unable to speak most of this time. Her husband, who also had accepted Christ at the same time as Cathy, and soon began attending Immanuel Lutheran Church. The visitation pastor and his wife would visit Cathy. During their visit the pastor would spiritually minister to Cathy while his wife did household chores and anything else that would make Cathy more comfortable. The parish nurse of our congregation also ministered to Cathy. Gradually Cathy began to regain her voice and her muscles. She did not attend church except on church holidays because she lived upstairs and it was painful for her to get down the stairs.

Our visitation pastor contacted the Aid Associations for Lutherans. This organization matched funds from the

congregations to purchase a lift. This allowed her to leave her apartment and begin to actively participate in church activities. She is on several committees and is always busy. One of the ways she serves the Lord is as a Stephen's Ministry. This is a non-denominational organization of Christian laypersons. After special training we minister one on one to church members who are in crisis in their life. Special accommodations were made for Cathy so that she can minister to those in need.

Our pastors and congregation have made it possible for Cathy and I to serve the Lord by ministering to others in need. This has strengthened our spiritual life and allows both of us a quality of life that we did not even have before we became ill. Please encourage pastors to reach out to those chronically ill members in their church.

Connie

It was sort of an unwritten rule that you don't talk about being depressed because it is a "sin." [unwritten rule] Not much help for my mid-life "empty nest" problems. I had to get out of this Pharisee/legalistic bent church. I wonder how much harm this attitude does?

"AmTrans"

Well, I told my pastor that I had to step down from working in the nursery on Sunday, both as coordinator and as worker and told him why. He was supportive in that and asks me how I am doing from time to time. Not so often that I feel weird but often enough that I feel cared for. I know that he prays for me and so do the ladies of

my groups. They also check on me. I need to tell you that irritable bowel syndrome is more open now than it was but still has that stigma to it that people tend to say..."Oh!" and not want to talk about it. So my advice to any leader is to pray ahead in the day so that whatever is shared will not throw them for a loop. If asking what is wrong they should be ready to hear...ha ha!

Cindy

I think pastors need to know that those in their congregations who live with chronic illness need understanding first, love second, and challenge third. When there are times when the ill person can't function, the church and its leaders need to be understanding, prayerful and available (for solving practical needs as well as spiritual counsel).

Love means everything to one who feels her body has rejected her and so much of her plight has to be endured alone. The person who lives with illness needs challenge to do what they can, at their speed, and to make a contribution to the body of Christ. Illness can sometimes be incapacitating, but it can also sometimes be an excuse not to serve. God has a job for everyone, even the bedridden can pray and encourage others by phone calls and notes. My church does an excellent job in this area, largely because both the pastor and his wife suffer chronic illnesses and live with daily pain. Of course, since I am the pastor's wife, I am a bit prejudice.

Kay

My church has not reached out to me because there is another far more

prominent person in our church who also has fibromyalgia. It is well known that she has it and when she has her bad times we are all urged to pray for her. When I shared with our pastor that I had just been diagnosed with fibromyalgia and was trying to come to terms with it, he just kind of shrugged it off and turned to someone else. That hurt. It has been four months now and he has not asked once how I'm handling it. I feel very alone in this thing, although I know that I'm not, and there is a third person that suffers just as I do. She has talked to me several times.

I would tell a pastor that just because a person is not as active in the church does not mean that they are not in need of pastoral care. Why should I become active if I'm not appreciated for being who I am? Obviously in their eyes I'm a nothing. A little pastoral care might make more people become more active.

Cora

I would say that it's extremely important for him/her to stay in touch with me. Keep the communication lines open. Call me. Stop by. Offer to help. Learn more about the illness, so you are informed. The reason I say all of the above is that when I experienced a flare after the birth of my daughter, I wasn't at church for months and never received even a phone call. Being so isolated and in major pain, I needed assistance, encouragement and communication from the outside world. It's so important to have someone call and offer to pray, even if there is nothing else they can do.

Even now, almost two years later, my pastor still hasn't called or stopped by, even though I raised the importance of staying in touch with members...very discouraging. I hope others may learn from this. At a time, I counted on my church family, there wasn't support offered. Just something to think about...and in case you're wondering, they were aware of my situation, they just chose not to get involved.

Karla

The main thing I would like to say is just because I am chronically ill or disabled, I am still capable of working for the Lord. Tell them not to just brush us off as workers that WANT to help. The only example I can send is while having a fundraiser for our new church, instead of letting me help one member gave me a tall stool to sit on and said, "you just sit here and let us do the work." I am disabled not senile! The disabled can and do want to help.

Alma

I once joined a small church where the pastor and several of the leaders paid a lot of attention to me and seemed like personal friends until they found out I had chronic fatigue syndrome and wouldn't be able to take on a 'fair' share of the work load. From then on I got only polite greetings as they switched their attention to people who could be more helpful. I felt that I had been used and eventually began looking for another church.

The one I'm in now hasn't done anything special to help but I feel loved and

accepted in spite of my limitations and that's what counts.

Jan

I'm probably not a good example as far as how my church has responded to my illness personally, because I'm on staff at the church and everyone knows me. Overall, though, my impressions are good of our church family's caring ways. For example, we had an elevated lift put in to assist anyone who has trouble with stairs. We have a Congregational Care Giver on staff and part of her job is to 'keep an eye' on those in poor health and keep on top of any special needs. Lastly, our church has started a HopeKeepers group, which I am leading along with one of the elders, who is a cancer survivor. We had our second meeting yesterday with a total of 8 people attending. During the first meeting there were only hard metal folding chairs in the room. After mentioning that this was very uncomfortable for those with arthritis or recovering from surgeries, etc., by the next meeting the chairs were replaced by ones with thick padding.

Joni

As a pastor myself, I see things from both sides... and I see where I could have done things much better in the past. Here are a few suggestions for the other pastors:

- When I say, "No." I mean that I can't do that. Not that I don't want to, but that I can't right now.
- But, please let me do what I am able to do. Denying me the opportunity to give as I'm able is also denying me of the wonderful feeling of giving

of myself. When you're asking everyone to pitch in and help, ask me too! There might be something I could do... address envelopes, make phone calls, etc.

- My illness is *not* caused by lack of exercise, the wrong food, lack of faith, not praying right, not praying enough, or because God is punishing me. Sometimes illness just happens. I don't need guilt on top of all the other stuff I have to deal with.
- I was not *blessed* with illness. This doesn't feel like a blessing at all. And if this is what blessings are, then I don't want any more!
- When I first fell ill, there were many people who wanted to help. Now that their help hasn't cured me, they have disappeared. I still need help from time to time.
- But I don't need a dozen casseroles in one day. I need someone to stop at the grocery store once in a while, or walk my dog, or pick up my prescriptions.
- When your church is not handicapped accessible, you are saying, "We don't want you here."
- And, if I'm in a wheelchair, *please!* Don't talk down to me. Don't talk loud or slowly as though I can no longer understand. I am still the intelligent, witty person I was before I lost the ability to walk. Don't address questions to whoever I am with when you want to know something from me.

- Talk to me. I can still hear, think, and speak. To speak down to me is insulting and degrading. (You would be surprised how many intelligent, educated people will still talk to a wheelchair-bound person as though they've become a deaf idiot.)
- And please, don't discuss details of my illness with others without my expressed permission. When someone asks how I'm doing, they don't need to know that I now have a catheter or that I am unable to eat. If I want them to know those details, I will tell you so. ASK, "When others ask, what shall I tell them?" I will be happy to tell you how much information to share.

Pastor Rebecca, Nehcet's disease, Ankylosing spondylitis, fibromyalgia, and still recovering from three spinal surgeries.)

I do not tell anyone at church about my chronic pain and fatigue. It makes me feel ashamed and that I would be complaining. When I read your devotions, I do not feel all alone. I appreciate what ya'll do. I would like to see a support group at our church like Rest Ministries.

Ruth

I attend a large church of over 3,500 people. There is no official group that helps people like me. However after I stepped out and joined a Bible study a group of women within that group gathered around to support me... one of them checks on me each day...when I need rides to

appointments or church one of them takes me... if I need to shop and don't feel like I can drive someone helps me out. They encourage me, support me in prayer and are learning to help me, as I am learning to ask for help. Your website and daily devotional has helped them help me, as much as it has encouraged me. And in turn I have shared it with others who struggle like I do...

Diane

The thing that stands out most to me is that my church family *accepts* that I am limited in what I can do *despite* the fact that my outward appearance looks normal. They either see me functioning --apparently normally--or not at all, because I am home in bed when I am having a bad day; and for them to accept my explanations of why I cannot do more is a real blessing. And, of course, they *pray* for me as soon as they see that I am not there.

Kate

I have had very different experiences. One church was wonderful and really supported me. People would send me cards and notes to let me know what they were praying for. Others would phone regularly for short calls. Others would take my children out to the park. Still others would give me a lift to hospital, town, etc and yet others would regularly leave meals on the doorstep or give meals to my hubby to heat up, as well as others doing shopping for me. They also regularly would hold the house group meeting in our house when I could attend. The pastor and elders anointed me with oil and prayed for me on

several occasions and I always felt supported and loved. All our family benefited from being accepted and supported and this enabled me to reach out in better days with my gifts in song and friendship.

The church I am now in, after moving house, has really hurt me and let me down. They ignore you unless you are in church on a Sunday, when they tell you how much they love you, but that love is not supported by ANY actions at all. They believe God wants me well, and only stress me when I do manage to get out, because they think if I admit to being ill that I am faithless. I have been housebound most of this year and no one has cared to ask where I am [even though I used to lead the worship!!]. My hubby stopped going because no one was bothered about supporting either of the kids or us. I have written my pastor twice with wanting to be involved with ministry to the ill and housebound and he has ignored my letters. I phoned him a while ago to ask for him and the elders to meet with me to pray. He has never got back to me. I feel totally cut off from these people, and while I am not bitter, I am very sad. The example they have set to my non-Christian family and to all around me has been very bad for the cause of Christ.

The resultant depression and feelings of abandonment and being useless caused much depression and despair when other issues [like finances] threatened to destroy us and we had no one to turn to. My faith took a real battering and I actually believed for a time that God had turned His face from me. Psalm 13 became my

personal cry. Through His grace, I could still cry, "but I will yet praise you."

After suffering chronic illness for the last ten-plus years, the last four of which I've had hardly any fellowship or support at all, When I got the computer, I was given a gift in finding Rest Ministries and another Christian on-line ministry which I am now a part of as a moderator. I have been receiving daily, such opportunities to share fellowship and encouragement and hope with people all over the world. It has been fantastic, a complete lifeline in some very dark times.

There have been very dark days where I had no one here to turn to and God has provided for me through your ministry and the other ministry. I can even say that I think they saved my life, as I was feeling that suicide was the only rest for me. So I want to say a *big thank you* for this ministry, for all the prayers, love, and hope and truth which daily comes to me in my own home. You are a lifeline in a lonely sea.

I so much want to see the churches rise up and really show the great love of God for *all* His lambs and especially for His lambs, which are in the grip, and isolation of chronic illness. We are not useless or abandoned, but we are a part of the family of Christ and we want to come in from the cold!

Meg

One way my church has reached out to me, was a few women came over and helped me clean my house. That meant more to me than anything. I was so embarrassed, yet thankful! We need to be

the hands and physical means sometime for those who need it.

One of the ways my church hasn't ministered to me is there is not such a ministry at my church, and many can't relate to a chronic illness (fibromyalgia). I think most have the opinion that there "must be sin in her life," or "she's backsliden." And they've said this to me when I've been at rock bottom on strength; spiritually, physically and mentally! It's really easy to fall into depression when no one seems to care, the phone doesn't ring, no one writes... yet, God is faithful! This ministry has been a Godsend! You hit different rough spots in a chronic illness, and people aren't always there for you, but God is and this ministry has been!

Since I found your website and receive the daily devotionals, my whole outlook has been more focused on the Lord and I've had the strength to get up and pray, "Lord I proclaim your power and victory in my life today!!" Another wonderful tool has been a devotional by Charles Spurgeon "Beside Still Waters."

Stacy

I was injured the first part of April and I do not know what I would have done without my church family. They brought me food, shopped for groceries and other needs for me, called or just stopped in to let me know they wanted to help. I am months from the injury now, but remain pretty much wheelchair bound. A loving couple that I hardly knew called me after about three months and asked if I felt I would be able to start coming to church if they could pick me and my wheel chair up on Sunday

mornings. They have faithfully done this for over three months now.

Other friends have gone out of their way to include me in group activities, providing transportation, and willing hearts to be there for me. Becoming pretty confined has opened me up to the needs of others around me. I was introduced to Rest Ministries sometime in May and have since read and passed on the devotionals to others--and not just to ailing people either! Some are very appropriate for the able-bodied too. They are a blessing to me.

Wilma

Do you have to be an alcoholic to

minister to an alcoholic? Do you have to have been a prostitute to minister to a prostitute? Do you have to have chronic pain or have a chronic illness to minister to me?

My pastor feels very uncomfortable with people who cannot work hard and "Go! Go! Go!" for the Lord. His sermons are filled with "you *must* do this and you *must* do that!" On the Sundays that I am able to attend, I leave the service beaten up and bloody in spirit because my body is unable to "Go! Go! Go!" I fight depression because of the chronic pain and lack of sleep so I'm also not "Happy! Happy! Happy!" all of the time. He feels that if you don't "whistle while you work" then you had better get on your knees before God and get right! (Like I could get down on my knees and then get up again?!)

Am I angry? Will I stop attending church because of this attitude? The answer is "no" to both questions. You see, I go to corporately worship my Father and I

have the joy of the Lord that leaves "happy" in the dust! Am I hurt? I have to answer "yes" to this one.

Dear Pastor,

I long for you to give me a gentle hug, send me a note, or make a phone call. I know you're busy! But, if you would just give me and others like me who suffer every hour of every day a word of encouragement in your sermons it would mean the world to me!

Pastor, give me hope from the Word. Show me where to find God's guidance when I'm too weak to find it myself.

Remind me that I am important in the eyes of our Father. You see, when the pain is great, I forget that God really cares. Assure me that when I cannot come to God's house that I am still a part of the family. Remind me that it is by God's grace that I am saved not by how much I accomplish.

You know what? Just love me. Love me and see me with our Father's eyes. I know you love me. I also know that healthy people often forget that not everyone is like them. Let's make a deal! I'll love you. I'll give you a gentle hug. I'll give you an occasional phone call. I'll pray for you. I'll tell you that I'm praying for you. I'll be as faithful as I can to the work of our Father.

I'll not expect you to know exactly how I feel. I'll not put any undo expectations on you.

In return . . . please love me and show me that love. Sincerely,

Judy

PS: I am a Public School Music Teacher on medical leave. I'm in the process of getting

my Master's Degree in Christian Counseling. I have severe fibromyalgia and depression caused by a chemical imbalance (due to sleep deprivation). I am also the associate pastor's wife. (One more thing . . . please don't judge my husband's work on my inability to work at his side.)

Maybe if there is a specific meeting that

a disabled person has shown interest in attending and can't, the church could ask if the group could meet at my house, as an option. That would be ideal for me, in my case. I usually would not suggest it myself because I feel like such an outsider already, a problem to them, etc. Plus, I'm aware of how difficult it is for people to do anything outside of their comfort zone, that that they are used to doing. Like pulling teeth. Plus, as we all are, I am exhausted and tired of fighting (them), tired of fighting for everything (or maybe I should say "working so very hard" for everything).

So for me, I'd love to have an offer once in a while. "*Could we bring dinner over? Could we meet at your house, so you could be included?*" Oh my! That would be too much. I'd probably have a stroke, so 'X' that idea!

There is something that does *not* help: There is a particular brother in Christ whom every time he sees me (once in a while) asks me the same questions and gives me the same promises: The questions are: first, "really miss you sister," then, "why haven't I seen you at church, where've you been?" Recently I've realized I have to forgive Roger, that the problem is ending up in me, as when he asks me this *again*, inside I am infuriated and the last time I

said to "where have you been?" "I've been the same place I've been every time I'm not there, the lights are too bright, I get so ill from one Sunday morning in church that I'm in bed or nonfunctional for a week to two weeks after. It is no longer worth it." To "when are you coming back?" "I'm coming back either after I get healed or after the lights are fixed at church." (There are lights to replace those there but each of the ten or so light fixtures will take 1-1 1/2 hours to change.) No one interested, with time, or willing.

Then the clincher, "Get your number to me...I'll give you a call and we can hang out (worship/evangelize, etc., all of which I'd love to do)." But he has my number, he *never* calls, and there's no 'hanging out'." So, please convey to the pastors, do not say with your mouth what you do not come through with. It is painful and cause for growing resentments.

In addition, could lay people be trained to listen for what it is exactly that keeps an ill person from being able to attend church, and somehow go about endeavoring to help resolve the problem (gather a team to help if not able to singularly) instead of continually putting guilt on the ill person for not showing up. Maybe there could be a small team already put in place that anyone in the church could refer someone like me to, when she/he hears me make a comment about not being able to get there. Because everyone in the church will at least be educated/or trained to listen for such comments.

One wonderful experience that I had: Background, I'd been waiting for

months for a member to have time to come over and hook up my stereo system. I had to be persistent, call once in awhile, each time he'd forgotten. Then I called and got Lynda, his wife. She knew I'd fallen through the loophole several times, said she'd go down to basement and talk to Paul. When she called back, she said that they could come that evening and would like to bring food for dinner (the whole family, husband, wife and two kids) naming what she had to bring, and asked if I had anything to add to the meal. (He would fix the stereo as we fixed dinner.) I was so elated with her idea, and overjoyed at having the fellowship (not able to attend church presently).

It was late for me to have company (as the later the day gets the more pain and fatigue I have) so I just called her back and asked her to be patient, I may be slow, and she can help me do the big stuff. We had a wonderful evening. And the extra pain was worth the company.

Wendy

My name is Jennifer. I am 21 and from Australia and have been suffering from chronic pain and fatigue (fibromyalgia) for seven years. My church family hasn't been much of a support to me at all. I attempted to start a group for people who are in chronic pain but they told me that the church didn't have enough resources to focus on a new ministry. They needed a leader to come forward and asked me to pray for one.

I am terribly lonely. It is hard to be sick and I try to hide my pain so people don't get fed up with being around a sick person all the time. I haven't found anyone

at church who has been able to deal with what I'm going through maturely but I will keep looking because I need the support of prayer.

One example of my church not understanding is one of the youth leaders. I was talking to him and I had explained to him about fibromyalgia and he listened and seemed very interested and asked intelligent questions. Then after church he was talking to me and I felt myself grow further and further away from reality. I was heading into a faint but could not register what was happening or do anything about it. I collapsed on the floor and this leader said "Are you ok?" I was totally dazed, dizzy and shaking all over feeling like I'd lost my bearings. "Yeah," I said in a disorientated way, because that's just what you say when someone asks you what's wrong, but I was on the floor! I was white as a sheet, shaking and not in very good shape. This person just kept on talking to me as if nothing had happened. My brother finally came through the door, took one look at me and realized what had happened.

I think maybe this leader did not listen to me when I was telling him what could happen to me. If he had done some research, knew first aid, etc. He may have been able to see that something was not right. I understand that it is my role to educate people about my illness because not even some of my specialists even know what it's on about but if this sort of thing comes to the notice of church staff they should offer support in the form of prayer and try to understand it themselves. It could have been a bad flare where I'd need

hospitalization. I don't expect everyone to be medically trained but hope they learn to listen and are willing to learn about chronic illness.
Jennifer

My church has not effectively reached out to me. They seem to operate under the misconception that a person who is disabled by a chronic illness, as I am, doesn't need to serve the church. They are content with my just showing up for worship when I am able.

I feel a compelling need to serve my Lord and my church. But I am no longer physically able to fill any of their traditional roles offered as service opportunities. When suggesting possible alternatives, I am met by rejection where it might cause someone else more work, or they just can't see out of 'the box', or simply patted on the head and told to rest and not worry. This makes me feel useless, helpless, and a "lesser" person in the church - a burden.

My disability makes it extremely difficult for me to counteract these obstacles - I need my pastor or another leader to champion my cause for me. I need him to teach/motivate others in the church to extend a hand so that I might participate as fully as God allows.

Rest Ministries is allowing me to become a part of their writing team for daily devotionals. This not only motivates me to find adaptive ways of reading/studying scriptures again but also provides an opportunity of sharing how God works in and through me. This fills my heart with joy and reinforces in me the knowledge that God does still have use of me in this world yet.

Jean

I went to a church that, because I was too sick to work, assumed my problem was laziness. While the truth was that I had been ordered to take at least a year off to recover from major back surgery, they actually called on the Lord to remove the "Spirit of Laziness" which had infiltrated me (this was a charismatic church, as you can tell). While I firmly believe in the laying on of hands for the sick, I feel that those who minister to the sick should at least be required to be knowledgeable about their congregant's illness before making such sweeping statements, especially during prayer.

John

My Dad, James Washington passed away with cancer on August 8, 2000 after a four-year battle with cancer. He accepted Christ into his life on 04-06-2000 during a prayer session between he and I.

What especially encouraged my Dad during the last four months of his life was his pastor, Promise Lee, stopping by to visit and to pray with him and give him communion at our family home in Colorado Springs. My Dad was never able to make it to church during the last four months of his life and these visits by the pastor were so good for him.

The pastor also encouraged him daily and uplifted my Father in terms of telling my Dad he would continue to pray for him in between visits to the home. I know these visits made all the difference in

my father's spirit during his last days this side of heaven.

I so appreciate your ministry, because it was the ministry that God's holy spirit sent to me via the internet. Your prompt response was so wonderful and gave me some encouragement I needed while my father went in and out of the hospital the last four months of his life. You also sent me to the website *Hope through the Storm* and I began receiving their newsletter.
Mary

Rest Ministries has helped me to be more compassionate and to know that others go through similar trials as I do. As of now, my church has no outreach for the chronically ill, and it would be a great benefit. God is working through this mission in a great and powerful way to connect hurting souls and give them hope through Christ.

Tina

I have attended, on a regular basis, two churches since I have come down with my chronic pain condition (severe back and leg pain). The difference in how these two churches have ministered to me has been incredible.

At the first church I attended, no one called me and I do not know of anyone that was praying for me on a regular basis. Part of the problem was me--as I feel that I did not stress to them how desperate I was. As a consequence, I feel that had I not been a believer for so long as I have been, I might have committed suicide, as it was *so dark*. The pastors never once asked how I was doing with my pain. They told us that they

cared, but the actions were not there to prove that they cared. This was most devastating to me. This first church has since changed and is reaching out to members more now.

At the church that I am in now, I have frequent contact with the pastor and his wife and, when I get really bad, I know that they really intercede for me and the pastor often is asking me how I feel. I know that their prayers have literally carried me through some situations that I would not have made it through if they had not been praying for me. It really does make a difference to have a pastor and leaders that prove their love to us!

Virginia

I have been saved twenty years and ministered all over the western US for twelve years in lot of different denominations. It was almost impossible to get them to reach out to the visible sick. If they won't reach out to a cancer victim, an AIDS victim or a helpless homeless person, it was quite that they would not reach out to an invisible disability. I got out of ministry because of the insensitivity of the church as a whole to help and encourage people (not me) who couldn't help them. Some will give their money but not there time. Personally, I believe that you need to be blanketed with lots of prayer cause only the Lord can change their hard hearts and ways.

Bill

I would like to share my experience. I only share this with the hope that it will help to improve the quality of care given by

church pastors, pastoral care teams and church leaders. Sadly I am amongst those that have not had the support of their church pastors, leaders etc. I learnt many years ago that my help comes from the Lord and that He is my strength, my joy and my deliverer.

I write this with concern not for myself but for others who may not have had the support of a wonderful, godly husband and our strong faith in our Lord. Unfortunately I have seen many leave the church in bitterness because they have not had the help they wanted or asked for.

It has been over twelve months since I wrote a letter to inform my pastor of my condition. I have not had any pastoral care team member or church leader ring me or approach me to see how I am. (Its almost like I am invisible). I do not expect my pastor to run after me as I know he must be extremely busy, but I thought at least someone on the prayer team, or pastoral care team, or church leader would give a quick call to see how I am.

At first I was hurt, feeling rejected and lonely, thinking it was just me but after hearing story after story of this happening to other folk I began to realize it was a problem and a concern within the church. Somehow they have missed something very important and many are getting hurt and leaving the four walls of the church to sit at home rejected, lonely and discouraged with the church.

If anything can be gained by my writing this, it is that the pastors and leaders realize something is dreadfully wrong with their follow up of their people. I have of recent times had to pull out of some

things I was involved in due to the fact that I can't make it to church each week, sometimes it can be weeks and I dislike letting people down. I find many do not understand that with a chronic illness you may look well on the outside but inside you are aching and not well at all.

When we got the internet only four months ago, I was searching the internet one day for info on fibromyalgia and the Lord led me to the Rest Ministries site. I was so impressed I joined up for the daily devotional, and then as time went on I joined the prayer team (I was able to feel of some use again). Eventually, and on tip-toes (not being used to the internet etc) I joined up with share and prayer and then share and prayer 2.

I have found comfort, encouragement, fun, love and the love of Christ here. These wonderful ladies and some men have been a great source of inspiration for me, while suffering one chronic illness sometimes two or more and other illnesses they rise up above their illness to encourage others.

This ministry has made a big impact on my life, where once I felt like there was no use for me anymore, I could no longer serve the Lord in the way I was used to, my life as I had known it had gone, it has been a process of losing my old self and thanks to Rest Ministries folk regaining a new me. One with more strength, joy, insight and passion for Christ than before. I would hate to think where I would be without the folk here. I may not post as often as others (due to the 15 -17 hrs time difference) but I am always checking the posts and encouraged and blessed daily. I feel I can once again

encourage others, pray for others, and even be an inspiration to others regardless of what illness I may suffer. I hope and pray this is of some help to you for your upcoming conference. May God continue to bless you as you serve Him.

Debbie

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