

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

The 'Sandwich Generation'

The "sandwich generation" is a good description. There's pressure from both sides and sometimes it gets messy in the middle. That's what it can feel like if you're taking care of not only your children but your aging parent as well.

Add in a spouse and a job and it's no wonder it often seems a 24-hour day and seven-day week just aren't enough for all you have to do.

Then, too, from the time all of us were little we were taught there is a right way and a wrong way to accomplish a task. To meet—and overcome—a challenge. Maybe your parent took care of Grandma or Grandpa. Your spouse took care of your mother- or father-in-law. Your friends or co-workers seem to be able to handle their situations. But you

When you realize, when it becomes so painfully obvious, you can't do all the things you're supposed to do—all the things other people have done or are doing—you feel so inadequate. So guilty.

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If you find yourself in that situation, or feel yourself sinking into it, these suggestions might help:

- Remember there is no single "right" way to do this. Trying to exactly mimic what another person has done probably isn't going to work. Each case is unique because the personalities and problems in each case are unique.

- If you don't take care of yourself—take time to eat, sleep, catch your breath and pray—you will burn out quickly and be of little use to anyone, including yourself. The situation in which you find yourself is

not a sprint, it's a marathon. Yes, someday it will end but that may be a long, long time from now. In the meantime, if you do not pace yourself, sometimes even pamper yourself, you won't be able to keep going. That's not because you're weak, it's because you're human.

- The big picture can look and feel overwhelming. Sometimes it helps to break it down into the many tiny pieces that make up the whole. What you have to do for your parent. Your children. Your spouse. Your job. Yourself. The lists may be long but somehow no single item is overpowering.

- Prioritize your tasks. Making those lists helps. (Obviously, getting Mom to a doctor's appointment is more important than vacuuming her apartment.)

- Give away some of the low-priority duties. Someone else can be hired to do the apartment cleaning. Someone else—the bakery department at the local grocery store—can supply the brownies you're supposed to send to the next Cub Scout den meeting.

- Get support for yourself. Groups for caregivers and organizations that focus on your parent's particular illness or condition can help you deal with what you are facing. Doctors, social workers and the Area Agency on Aging can give you local contacts.

- Write it down. Dates and schedules and all that information from doctors, therapists, pharmacists, teachers, coaches, your boss, your spouse, your kids There's no way a person can remember all the things you need to remember.

It may seem the day is completely packed but if you jot down your own "to do" list, you may discover there's half an hour free here. Twenty minutes there. A little oasis like that gives you something to look forward to. A short break to at least partially recharge your batteries before you have to go, go, go again. □

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*Sometimes my life feels
like a tug-of-war, Lord.
And I'm the rope.*

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**Are you a long-distance caregiver
looking for help in your parent's area?**

Use the Eldercare Locator. It's *free!*

1-800-677-1116 (weekdays, 9 am-8 pm ET)

www.eldercare.gov

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