

# Catholic Caregivers

*'Caregiving is pro-life!'*

## When You're Married to the Caregiver

If you're the husband or wife of an adult child who is taking care of an aging parent, it can seem that no matter what you say or do, it's the wrong thing.

Suddenly you may find yourself an outsider as the immediate family circle closes ranks.

You may feel tremendously frustrated about your powerlessness: You cannot make everything all right; you cannot stop the pain your spouse is feeling.

Here are a few points to consider, a few suggestions, that may make this time easier:

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*Don't take it personally  
if you are suddenly outside the loop.*

*When no one really wants to hear your opinion  
because this is a "family" matter.*

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- Remember that the relationship you have with your in-laws is not the same as the one your husband or wife has. This is simply human nature. No matter how close you may have become to your mother- or father-in-law, your experience is not the same as your spouse's.

So while you may feel the two of you are doing more than enough to help, your spouse may not feel that way at all.

- Understand that every immediate family has its own little quirks—good or bad. Maybe Dad has always had a short fuse. Maybe Mom has never been able to relax if there was one speck of dust on one stick of furniture.

Maybe family members never talk to one another, they yell. Maybe they never yell . . . or talk. Whatever those characteristics, they may be intensified under the present, stressful circumstances.

- Don't take it personally if you are suddenly

outside the loop. When no one really wants to hear your opinion because this is a "family" matter.

At the same time, you may very well be affected by the decisions being made by your spouse and the other siblings. It's not uncommon that several sons will decide what's best for Mom or Dad but it is the daughters-in-law who end up providing almost all the care.

Then, too, the opposite may occur. Your spouse's siblings are no help and so it is up to your spouse and you to do everything.

- Know that sometimes you will become the target for your spouse's emotions. The anger, the fear, the sadness, the frustration, the guilt. Again, try not to take it personally. Most likely it's not really meant for you but for something else. For the disease or medical problem that is taking the life of your spouse's parent. For the pain. For death.

- Remember that while it may seem this situation has been going on forever and it will never end, *it is* temporary. *It will* end.

In the meantime, you may feel somewhat neglected, but remember, your spouse is being pulled in many different directions: aging parent, you, the children, the job. This is a time when he or she especially needs your help and your understanding.

A spouse also needs to hear, "You're doing a good job helping your parent but *you can't do everything.*" It's hard to hear that. It has to be said gently over and over again.

It can seem pretty obvious to you that your spouse has assumed a new role: caregiver to an aging parent. What you need to remember is that during this time, you, too, have a new, special and vital role as well: Taking care of the caregiver. Supporting the caregiver. Consoling the caregiver. Loving the caregiver. □



*Father, Son, and Spirit, bless my marriage. Be with us as we face the challenges ahead.*

*Help me be supportive, understanding, loving, and comforting to my spouse.*

*Thank you for the love we share. Amen.*

**Catholic Caregivers** is a free monthly publication of CatholicCaregivers.com, a program of the Friends of St. John the Caregiver. Parishes, Knights of Columbus councils, schools and other Catholic organizations are encouraged to make and distribute copies. For more information, go to [www.CatholicCaregivers.com](http://www.CatholicCaregivers.com).

**Vol. 1, No. 7**

0609

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