

**U.C.C. WELLNESS MINISTRIES TOOLKIT**  
**Section 3**

**EXEMPLARS OF WELLNESS MINISTRIES ACTIVITIES**

**Mental Health and Wellness**

**Title:** *Caring Companions*

**Age groups served:** Adults

**Reason for development and implementation:**

Within our congregations, some individuals identified they would enjoy a mutual relationship with another person and a chance to talk about shared experiences. This observation was brought to the attention of the Wellness Ministries Team, and the idea was explored further. As a result, a program titled *Caring Companions* was developed and implemented. The program is different in purpose and design from a visitation program.

An announcement was placed in the church newsletter and the Sunday worship bulletin. "*Would you like to get to know someone in the congregation better? Would you like to participate in a twice-a-month activity with another congregation member? Want to learn about Caring Companions? Speak to someone on the Wellness Ministries Team or leave your name in our mailbox in the church office, and we will explain this unique opportunity.*"

*Caring Companions* were matched based on each individual's responses to questions as to interests and types of activities they would enjoy. Because relationship building takes time, each needed the ability to commit to a minimum of a twice-a-month interaction with the other person for one year. At the end of that time, the individuals could re-commit for another year or ask for a new match to learn more about another individual.

Interactions could be as simple as a shared cup of coffee, taking a drive to view the countryside, attendance at a church program, a shared hobby, or going to a movie or community theater production. The two companions would mutually agree upon the activities.

**Sharing the story:** Developing connected relationships

Irene was new to the community and the congregation. As a woman in her later years, she found it challenging to find and make close friends. The people she met were each already part of longtime friend groups, or they did not have her energy level or as broad interest in the arts as she did.

Irene became a potential match with a middle age woman also new to the community. Betsy had an interest in exploring what the small city had to offer. After the two women met and chatted, they decided to be *Caring Companions* for the following year. The planned encounters during that time included meeting for lunch, attending church activities, community events, and trips into a larger city for musical events and plays. As they learned more about each other, they also shared life events such as birthdays and other meaningful anniversaries from their life experiences. The creation of collective memories enabled discussions that could be returned to at a later date. The statements that started with "remember when..." even as a new experience unfolded helped to build a sense of connectedness.

### **Evaluation:**

- Four *Caring Companion* dyads were created. Some were individuals of the same generation. Others identified common interests with individuals from a different generation.
- Each dyad was unique in how their relationship developed and their chosen activities.
- One dyad met for coffee at a coffee shop twice a month for one year. The conversations focused on their individual experiences since the last time.
- Two dyads had a bit more diversity in what they did together. They planned shared experiences and tea times where they just caught up.
- One dyad gradually evolved over the year and, by mutual agreement, moved into weekly contact, whether by phone or in person. In-person meetings ranged from chats to attending programs at the church or in the community. They decided to continue the commitment for a second year.
- All expressed what a blessing it had been to develop a unique, mutual relationship with another person within the congregation.

### **Next steps:**

- Review with the participants the benefits and challenges they experienced. Ask for suggestions for improvement.
- Continue to offer the opportunity to participate in *Caring Companions*. The number of participants may vary from year to year. But the program's benefit exists whenever a person wishes to enhance their connectedness with a person who is part of the congregation.

### **Resources:**

- [Loneliness and Social Isolation - Tips for Staying Connected](#) developed by the National Institute on Aging of the National Institute of Health, provides many valuable resources on this site.
- [Why Companionship is Good for Your Mental Health](#), having someone to talk with is essential. Having someone who dialogues with you is even more critical.