TELECARE MINISTRY: *Essential Stewardship That Any Congregation Can Do*

You know the story all too well: Some members of your church who used to be active and present every time you opened the door now seem to be absent more often than not. "In fact, when was the last time we saw that family in church?" you ask yourselves as a staff, or at a church board, parish council or vestry meeting.

What might be shocking to realize is that **that person's or family's absence may be for a longer time than you think—perhaps much longer.** Allow a true story, with the names changed to protect the guilty and injured parties.

Jeanine was an active member of her downtown Episcopal Church in the Midwest. She came into the church many years ago, deeply moved by the liturgy, and by the mature way that her church looked at faith and Holy Scripture. She became very involved at church, and, having a Masters in Arts and Religion from a seminary, began to teach Adult formation classes, eventually heading up the Christian formation for adults program.

Then Life stepped in. After going through some personal and family crises, Jeanine found herself going to church less and less. Her faith was at its lowest point in her lifetime, and she felt she had no place to go.

What surprised Jeanine most was that **no one seemed to notice she stopped coming to church.**

So, *she decided to wait until someone from her church called to check in on her*. Two times the annual pledge campaign letter arrived in her mailbox like clockwork, with pledge card duly enclosed. However, the letter was always addressed, "Dear Member of All Saints," **the cardinal sin of annual pledge drives** in most churches: not addressing each letter personally through the use of mail merge, and not personally signing each letter, including a brief hand-written note expressing gratitude for previous ministry service and giving.

Into the trash went the anonymous letter and pledge card, *and Jeanine's relationship with All Saints Church.*

As of this writing, no one has called on her yet; it has been three years now. This year, the priest has announced his retirement, and All Saints Church is moving on without her. Sadly, *neither the priest nor any staff person ever thought to call Jeanine.*

The story has a happy conclusion, however: Jeanine has found a new church home (of a different denomination), located a few blocks from her former parish, and in this church she has found the caring community her heart needed for healing. Good for her. Seriously.

What is most sad about this story, though, is that **the loss of Jeanine from All Saints Church was entirely preventable.**

Has your church lost any Jeanine's over the last few years? The last few months?

An active **TeleCare ministry in your church could prevent this story from ever happening again**—or make it extremely unlikely that it would ever happen.

What Is TeleCare?

In short, TeleCare ministry is a lay-led, lay-driven stewardship and pastoral ministry that expresses your church's care and concern to *every member—and "permanent visitor"—on your parish membership list.* When done properly, an effective TeleCare ministry will likely prevent any member from ever "falling through the cracks," as we often hear from clergy and lay staff members.

Best of all—it's free.

All it requires is organization, commitment, and people who are willing to call others, to pray with them and remind them of your congregation's love for them. It will require work to get started and keep going, but the results of the ministry will prove the work absolutely worth it.

TeleCare first came to my attention in 2001. An article appeared online from the National Council of Churches extolling "California Church's 'Telecare' Ministry Proving Its Value in September 11's Wake." The story goes on to recount the birth of the ministry at St. Patrick's Episcopal Church in 1992, the "brainchild" of Rev. Fran Sweet, an Episcopal deacon, and the Rev. David Davidson-Methot, a priest at the church at that time. Deacon Fran calls the TeleCare ministry as "a phone call of love." In a recent phone conversation, she described it as a loving process. "We simply wanted to reach out and see how people were doing, and offer to pray for them about anything going on in their life or on their mind. *The call is to remind them that their church loves them.*"

The Rev. Nancy Brown, a lay member at St. Patrick's in 1992, introduced the TeleCare Ministry when she came on clergy staff at St. Augustine's By the Sea, in Santa Monica, in 1998. The article went on to describe how that parish used the TeleCare ministry after the attacks in New York City to check-in with people during the weeks following the attacks. Many parishioners in the parish had friends and acquaintance affected by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

How Does TeleCare Work?

The genius behind the "phone call of love" is the one and only question that callers ask. It goes like this: Trained TeleCare ministry volunteers will *call the entire church membership on a regular basis*, asking this question:

> "We're calling to see how you are and if there's anything you want us to pray for?"

That is it. Such a question clearly expresses itself as a ministry of caring. Who wouldn't be touched to receive a phone call from a church member and be asked such a question? **Most of us would welcome that call.** However, *some members might feel that the church has long ignored them—like Jeanine*. Therefore, for a time—especially when getting such a ministry started—you might get an earful about the church. Listen to what is being said, and to what is ***not*** being said. If you listen without judgement, and agree with any truth that might be stated, you just might preserve a relationship with that member. Perhaps the pastor can follow up.

One never uses the TeleCare call for anything other than this one question. You cannot ask the household or person you called about money—*or anything else.* No "Did you receive our pledge card?" No questions about church attendance (or lack thereof); no inquiries about people's whereabouts; no promotion of church events. TeleCare is also not a counseling hotline or service, nor a place for gossiping! ("Have you seen the pastor's new haircut? *Mercy!* You simply must get to church to see it!")

What are the Key Benefits?

The biggest benefit of TeleCare is that you are regularly calling all members, saying, basically, "We love you, and want to support you in prayer." *Your beloved people will feel cared for, and looked after by their church.* With proper use of recordkeeping, **no one will fall through the cracks ever again**. And, you ***will*** discover and respond to needs of members; member will know concretely that their church is there for them and cares for them. That is the most important value from the investment of time and effort in starting and maintaining this ministry: **people will feel cared for, and looked after by their church**.

Once it is up and running, an active TeleCare ministry is actually a true expression of stewardship: it is the care and tending of ***relationships***. In her bestselling book, *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown writes, "Connection, along with love and belonging (two expressions of connection) is why we are here, and it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives." Relationships of love and belonging are at the heart of a vibrant church community, because they provide the connection with others that is essential to being human. Jesus models for us the ideal of self-giving relationships, relationships based on mutual love, compassion, and respect, which gives life. *TeleCare fosters that sense of connection* in that it is an expression of the church's love and belonging for its members.

Who is Involved?

Here is where great care must be taken. To have an effective TeleCare ministry, you must find people who can listen to others without interrupting them. People who can sincerely pray *with* others, and pray **for** others, either spontaneously, or from a set prayers provided. People comfortable working as part of a team ministry, who possess good phone skills, and who can record brief notes on a form.

Most importantly, in TeleCare ministry *you **must** have people who can keep confidences*, who can keep calm when necessary and remain non-reactive. When you regularly call your membership, and ask them: "We're calling to see how you are and if there's anything you want us to pray for?" the caller may discover some things that need to be handled well, with respect, confidence, and calmness. More often than not, however, the calls will be well received and a positive experience for all involved.

Where & When Does it Happen?

Multiple teams of two persons make calls from the church offices—probably as many two-person teams as your church has out-going phone lines. You will need to decide which day, at what hour and for how long you wish to make the calls: say, every third Tuesday, from 6:00 to 7:30 PM (or 6:30 to 8:00PM, if using a 90-minute window). Of course, you should have as many qualified TeleCare ministry volunteers as you can, so that the same groups of people are not always the ones calling—that would get exhausting for anyone!

In this digital age, people most likely do not like tele-marketing calls (understandably so). Because it is a team ministry, and because of the prevalence of Caller I.D., *TeleCare ministry works best when the calls are placed from the church offices,* so that the name of the church pops up on the Caller I.D. of the person called. (You might need to encourage those "cell phone only" members to put the church telephone number(s) in their cell phone, so they can take advantage of knowing who is calling them, too.)

Calling from the church office preserves the team aspect of the ministry, as well—especially since the team will pray together before they make their calls, and afterwards, including the prayer requests that they discovered while making the calls. You may ask if the person would like to add their request to the parish prayer list used at the Prayers of the People (or other appropriate time in worship). They may say "yes," or "Yes, but anonymously" or they may decline. *Do inform them that you will be praying for them at the end of all calls that evening*; they may wish to remain anonymous there, too. If so, respect that.

Any serious pastoral information should be given to the clergy upon consent: simply ask, "May I let the clergy know about this, and have them follow up with you?" Nine times out of ten, they will agree. Keep pastoral concerns of a serious nature confidential, unless told otherwise by the member household you called.

In your church, you may have a large contingent of people who would prefer that TeleCare calls take place at another time of day—say the morning, or mid-afternoon. With a good church management database, such a preference could be noted, and a team assigned to make calls to that group when they come up in rotation—which may be ideal for certain volunteers. Here in Arizona where I live, we have congregations that serve many retirement communities, so a church may need to consider that option. Do what works best for your church; in time, you will discover what ideal times work for you.

The Necessity of Recordkeeping

In your church management database, it is vitally important to keep track of who has been called. You may wish to call through the membership alphabetically, or choose to mix it up in some way. No matter, *just keep track of who **has** been called,* so that everyone can receive at least one TeleCare call before you someone receives a second call.

Also, each time before you make calls, refresh the directory call list, in case someone has moved away (if you know they have) or has died. I can think of nothing worse than trying to call a deceased member of your church, and someone else answers the phone and is bewildered that you didn't know that; especially since the funeral may have taken place at the church, but the TeleCare minister didn't know that or attend. Awkward!

Conversely, during the course of a TeleCare call you may discover that "this number is no longer a working number" or that someone has—indeed—moved without telling the church office. (The nerve of some people!) TeleCare ministry may have the side benefit of helping you keep your church membership database up-to-date. Make notes of such discrepancies, and pass them on to the church office.

Since the results of each call is tracked and recorded, brief notations of date (and time?) of each call should be made to the church management database record of the member household, so that you can easily find out who has been called and who has not. Notations about leaving a message should be added to the record, as well, since it is not the TeleCare caller's fault they had to leave a message.

This data will prove valuable and may actually help settle a dispute about whether a household has been called or not. For instance, let us say someone comes to the church office and complains "No one from the TeleCare ministry has ever *called **our home**!*" Then you produce the date and time that several calls have been made—and who answered the call, or if a message has been left. End of discussion. Which makes TeleCare record keeping all the more important. It supports your ministry efforts with hard data, and that's always nice.

Once you have called your way through the entire membership, and have asked that caring question of each household—or left a message saying that you called to check in and ask for prayer requests—then go back to the beginning of the directory and start over calling the membership again. Check to make sure that recently added members to the church database are called first, so they are included. Then repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

Train Your Callers

Most TeleCare calls will be straightforward, but it is good to practice some calls before you begin. The following pages contain some practice scripts for training purposes, or actual use. Ideally, you will use them as a model or pattern for creating scripts specifically for your church.

Use the practice cards and try out the different calling scenarios; one person pretends to be the member who receives the call, and the caller has to respond to the scenario given to the call recipient. Afterwards, discuss as a group how the call went, and what the caller did (or could have done) that helped the call go well. The key idea is that whenever people try to get you, the caller, off the subject of the call—their well-being and any prayer requests that they might wish for you to pray about—gently redirect them back to your call's purpose:

"We're calling to see how you are and if there's anything you want us to pray for?"

Some sample reporting pages are also included, but you will want to design a reporting page that fits your own needs—feel free to adapt one of the sample pages and customize it.

It will help the launch of your ministry to announce it in church. Promote it widely throughout the church, and **remind people in church every Sunday of the week that calls will be made** that—"TeleCare ministry calls will be made this week; if you see it's the church calling, please pick up the phone and speak to our TeleCare minister."

Remember to work closely with your parish office to keep your calling list and records up-to-date and ready to use. In addition, do not forget to thank your TeleCare ministry volunteers from time to time for all their hard work. They deserve your thanks and praise for serving in this vital stewardship and pastoral ministry.

God bless you and best wishes!

Sample script and prayers to use for

TeleCare Ministry calls

19 May 2016 edition

Sample Script for TeleCare Ministry

Member answers the phone: Hello?

Caller: Is this _____?

Member: Yes it is,

Caller: Good evening, _____ . This is _____ from the TeleCare ministry at _____ Church.

[*For the first few round of calls:* "We're a new ministry at our church, and]

"We're calling to see how you are and if there's anything you want us to pray for?"

Commence with the conversation, keeping it focused on the member and member's household (if applicable).

Write down any prayer request you are given; use your judgement whether to ask

Caller: You know _____, this sounds (pretty serious/important/like this matters to you a great deal):

Would you like to put this on the parish prayer list used on Sundays?

Would you like the Rector/Vicar to know about this?

Depending on the nature of the request (and your comfort level) you may want to ask

Caller: Would you like me to pray with you right now about this?

If so, then pray for the request the member gave you, and for the member and the member's household (if applicable) For forms of prayers, see the following pages

OPTIONAL:

Caller: "By the way, we'll be making these calls regularly in the future: Is this a good time to reach you, or would a different time be better?"

EVERY CALL:

Caller: Please know that at the end of our time this evening, all of us TeleCare ministers here tonight will be praying for you and your request. Thank you for taking our call. Remember that God loves you, and we at _____Church love you, too.

Following the call, complete the form that indicates who you called, what day and time, and any information deemed useful; pass on to the designated person the results of all the calls, so basic details can be added to the congregational database. Pass the prayer requests to be added to the parish prayer list to the appropriate person, and give to the clergy (or pastoral care team) any information members requested to pass on to them.

Answering machine/voicemail script

"Hello, this is _____ from_____ Church. I'm part of the new ministry called TeleCare. It's now (time) on (day of the week). We were just calling to see how you are and whether there's anything you want us to pray for?

"I'm sorry to miss speaking with you. Know that when we're finished making all our calls tonight we will be praying for you.

"If you do have a prayer request you would like to share with us, please call the church office and leave a message for the TeleCare ministry with the person who answers the phone.

Again, sorry to have missed speaking with you. Remember that God loves you, and we at _____Church love you, too.

Forms of Prayer to use during TeleCare calls, *if needed.*

(Please note: pronouns in *italics* may be changed to the proper gender of the person for whom you pray)

For a Sick Person

O God of mercy and all comfort, our only help in time of need: We humbly pray you to look upon, visit, and relieve from illness your servant _____ for whom our prayers are offered.

Look upon *him* with your eyes of mercy; comfort *him* with a sense of your goodness; preserve *him* from the temptations of the enemy; and give *him* patience under *his* affliction. In your good time, restore *him* to health, and enable *him* to lead the rest of *his* life in your grace, and to your glory; and grant that finally *he* may dwell with you in life everlasting; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Or this

Merciful God, be near to the one who is troubled with sickness; in the power of your love, bring relief from present suffering and the return of health; that having been made whole in body, mind and spirit, he may give thanks again in the fellowship of the Church, and follow your will to the end of his days; we make this prayer through Jesus Chris tour Savior and healer. Amen.

For Recovery from Sickness

O God, the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers:
Mercifully accept our prayers, and grant to your servant *N*. the help of your power, that *his* sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

or this

O God of heavenly powers, by the might of your command you drive away from our bodies all sickness and all infirmity: Be present in your goodness with your servant *N*., that *his* weakness may be banished and his strength restored; and that, his health being renewed, *he* may bless your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For a Sick Child

Heavenly Father, watch with us over your child *N*., and grant that *he* may be restored to that perfect health which it is yours alone to give; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

or this

Lord Jesus Christ, Good Shepherd of the sheep, you gather the lambs in your arms and carry them in your bosom: We commend to your loving care this child *N*. Relieve *his* pain, guard *him* from all danger, restore to *him* your gifts of gladness and strength, and raise *him* up to a life of service to you.
Hear us, we pray, for your dear Name's sake. *Amen.*

Before an Operation

Almighty God our heavenly Father, graciously comfort your servant *N*. in *his* suffering, and bless the means made use of for *his* cure. Fill *his* heart with confidence that, though at times *he* may be afraid, he yet may put *his* trust in you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

or this

Strengthen your servant *N*., O God, to do what *he* has to do and bear what *he* has to bear; that, accepting your healing gifts through the skill of surgeons and nurses, *he* may be restored to usefulness in your world with a thankful heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

For Strength and Confidence

Heavenly Father, giver of life and health: Comfort and relieve your sick servant *N*., and give your power of healing to those who minister to *his* needs, that *he* may be strengthened in *his* weakness and have confidence in your loving care; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For Health of Body and Soul

May God the Father bless you, God the Son heal you, God the Holy Spirit give you strength. May God the holy and undivided Trinity guard your body, keep your soul, and bring you safely to that heavenly country where God lives and reigns forever and ever. *Amen.*

For Doctors and Nurses

Sanctify, O Lord, those whom you have called to the study and practice of the arts of healing, and to the prevention of disease and pain. Strengthen them by your life-giving Spirit, that by their ministries the health of the community may be promoted and your creation glorified; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thanksgiving for a Beginning of Recovery

O Lord, your compassions never fail and your mercies are new every morning: We give you thanks for giving our brother (sister) *N*. both relief from pain and hope of health renewed. Continue in *him*, we pray, the good work you have begun; that *he*, daily increasing in bodily strength, and rejoicing in your goodness, may so order *his* life and conduct that *he* may always think and do those things that please you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Chronic or Terminal illness

Compassionate God, we do not know how to pray as we ought. Accept our prayer as we commit _____ (or, this sick person) to your mercy, knowing that all things are your in life and in death—and that your love never fails.

Help us to find our hope and our joy in your will, and keep us steadfast in the faith that has sustained us, even to this hour; we make this prayer through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Or this

In this time of trouble, gracious Lord, we desire to give thanks for all the happiness that has been and for the love which holds us close to one another; give us grace to face with confidence all that is to be, knowing that you are working out all things to your glory. Comfort us in our moments of weakness, Lord Christ, and hold us close when we might feel lost or suffer despair; for it is in your Name we make this prayer. Amen.

Notes:

Suicide Prevention Hotline #:

AA Family Group referral #:

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

You are a child/young person who has answered the phone. Upstairs at home, your parents are fighting; they fight a lot lately. "I'm a little bit scared…"

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

"Everything's going great"
"How nice of you to call…"
Please keep my parents in your prayers, as they are dealing with aging –
Thanks for calling!

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

You haven't told anyone until now: your spouse/partner has early onset of Alzheimer's, and you are at a loss.
Request a prayer from the caller.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

You're grateful for the call.
You've just received a call from the hospital that your spouse (or parent, or child, or sibling) has been in an auto accident; you want a prayer before you go there to see him/her.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

You are stunned at receiving the call:
You haven't been in church for over two years.
Choose one of the following:

a) You could use some prayer; things are not well at work, and you fear you may be let go in the near future—you're glad the church called at this time;

b) "So why ***has*** no one from the church called in two years? Do we not matter?" You are unsure if you'll return to church. Thank them for the call, anyway.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

You are in disbelief at the call's timing—
your spouse's mother has had a
stroke two hours ago. Please pray,
add her to the parish prayer list:
Alice is her name.
You would love a follow-up
conversation with a priest.
You are grateful, grateful, grateful.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

[You are an answering machine/
voicemail recording.]

Invite caller to leave a message
and telephone number, and
you'll call them back.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

So grateful for the call.
You attempt to keep the caller on
the line with ***boring details*** of
recent life events. Eventually,
concede the point of the call,
and express your thanks
by the call's end.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

The call comes as a surprise, as you have been lost in thought, dealing with **a MAJOR life issue**.

DO NOT REVEAL THE ISSUE. ASK FOR A PRAYER, and to have a clergy person call you as a follow-up.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

"I just saw you last Sunday at church.
Everything's going great; well,
except for _____.

(Choose something that is a big deal,
but you try to downplay it.)

Keep it confidential. Yes, you can tell the clergy.
Prayers, please, but not on the parish prayer list.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

At first you are suspicious of the call.
"What do you want really? (money,
a pledge card, or other issue); *eventually,*
you feel the real sincerity and
you reveal your growing, private
concerns for your adult children
who are struggling in their lives.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

You have had "a death in the family,"
but **DO NOT let on** (for as long
as you can) that the death
was of a 15-+-year-old
beloved family pet.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

You are very worried about some upcoming medical tests, and what they might reveal.

Ask for a prayer from the caller.

"Yes" to parish prayer list.

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

You are happy to hear from the church, but forget about the prayers *(choose one of three options)*: "I need to _____."

a) "plan my funeral so my kids won't have to";

b) "to find a substitute for me this coming Sunday, because I can't make it to _____;"

c) "see how much I have paid this year on my pledge."

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

You are surprised but grateful for the call. After going back and forth for a few moments, you confidentially reveal that you need help—you admit to a serious drinking problem.

Caller cannot tell ***anyone***.

Ask "What should I do? "
Where can I turn for help?"

TeleCare Ministry
Practice Scenarios

You tell the caller (nicely!!) that you are unhappy with changes made at the church recently, and you want to tell someone/ talk about it.

Ask for prayers for your priest and vestry.

Individual Household Log

Date: _____

Name of person spoken to: _____

(place mailing label here)

Address change: _____

Phone change: _____

Circle information that applies:

No answer Busy Wrong Number Not home Call back

For completed calls, write down pertinent information such as health, family, interests, specific problems, positive comments, etc.

_____

_____

_____

Signed (Telecare caller) _____

Multiple Household Log

Caller	Date	Start time	Stop time	Total calls	Total Conversations
Family called		Result	Comments		
Family called		Result	Comments		
Family called		Result	Comments		
Family called		Result	Comments		
Family called		Result	Comments		
Family called		Result	Comments		
Family called		Result	Comments		
Family called		Result	Comments		

Result codes:

T = Telephoned
S/w = spoke with
P = prayer request
FLAG = flag for pastor

B = busy
NA = no answer
NIS = not in service
Rec = left message on recorder

Multiple Household Log

Please give this sheet to your Telecare Captain

Captain_____Month ____ Telecare caller _____

Member Contacted	Emer-gency	Reg-ular	Comments
Name Phone			
Name Phone			
Name Phone			
Name Phone			
Name Phone			

Information yo" want to share with people this month:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Follow-up needed by captain or church staff (say who):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Follow Up Needed

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Attention:

Pastor _____

Crisis Team _____

Prayer Chain _____

Team Leader _____

Other _____

Needed:

Prayer _____

Home Visit _____

Follow-up call _____

Referral _____

Other _____

Action Taken:

By _____

Date _____

Results:

_____

_____

_____

Pastor's Immediate Response Record

Date _____

Telecare Caller _____

Name of person with need _____

Phone number _____

Address _____

City _____

Need, request _____

Response and Comments—To be completed by pastor and returned to the Telecare Caller (record date and results of call or visit)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Date returned to Telecare caller _____

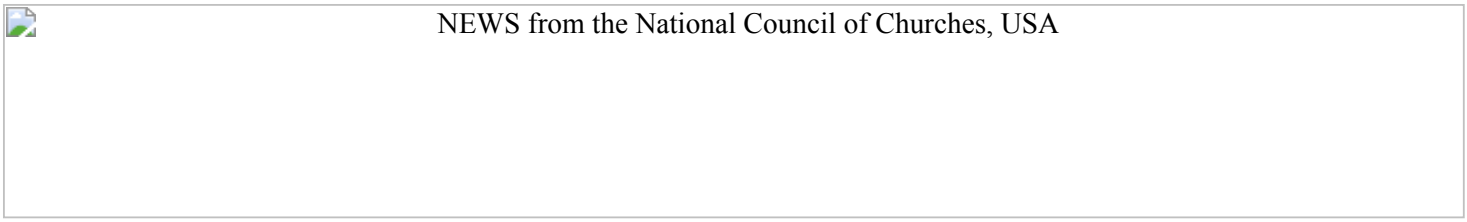
Prayer Request Sheet

Date of Call: _____

Caller(s): _____

Note: because of the confidentiality of these calls, please carify whether or not the call is to be made by a telecare member only, whether or not it should be passed on to Sunday morning prayers or wether or not it should be put on the list for ongoing prayer.

Pray for _____ Who is Sick	Requested by	Pray for _____ In the Hospital	Requested by
Pray for _____ who needs strength, healing	**Requested by**	**Pray for _____ who has surgery upcoming**	**Requested by**
Pray for ____ who has family problems	**Requested by**	**Pray for _____ who needs guidance**	**Requested by**
Pray for _____ who will be travelling	**Requested by**	**Pray for____ and his/her special need**	**Requested by**



CALIFORNIA CHURCH'S "TELECARE" MINISTRY PROVING ITS VALUE IN SEPTEMBER 11'S WAKE

October 19, 2001, SANTA MONICA, Calif. -- At St. Augustine-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church in Santa Monica, a simple, ongoing telephone outreach ministry is helping connect and support members in the wake of September 11. The "TeleCare" ministry has been especially meaningful for one of its volunteers, whose New York City-based company lost 87 people when the World Trade Center collapsed.

TeleCare is the brainchild of the Rev. Fran Sweet and the Rev. David Davidson, who pioneered the program at St. Patrick's Episcopal Church in Thousand Oaks, Calif., in 1992. The Rev. Nancy Brown, a lay member of the St. Patrick's TeleCare team the second year it was in operation, introduced TeleCare to St. Augustine-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church in Santa Monica when she joined the staff there in 1998.

Every six months for the past three years, TeleCare volunteers at St. Augustine-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church have phoned each of the congregation's 250 member families, and said, "We're just calling to see how you are and whether there's anything you want us to pray for," according to Gretchen Haight of Brentwood, Calif. A hospital chaplain, she is TeleCare's coordinator.

Two three-member volunteer teams spend one hour one evening a month at the church, making calls and then praying together for each person contacted, naming each joy and concern. TeleCare "is a quiet ministry, but it has mattered a lot," Mrs. Haight said. It helps keep St. Augustine's far-flung, busy urban congregants connected, and people "appreciate the call, often saying it came just when they needed it."

Since September 11, St. Augustine-by-the-Sea Church has held special services, sponsored a weekend family retreat – and, on October 10, activated its fall round of TeleCare calls. The three-member team "on duty" included Gretchen Haight and her husband, Peter.

President of the California office of Fiduciary Trust Company, Mr. Haight had worked on the 94th floor of #2 World Trade Center in New York before transferring to the Los Angeles office in 1984. He counts 25 close friends and colleagues among the company's 87 employees lost when the World Trade Center collapsed. 560 employees survived.

The three-member TeleCare calling team reached about 40 families in all on October 10. "About half the people I talked to knew that I'd lost friends, and they were asking all about me," Mr. Haight said. "It was very much a two-way thing. I felt supported by them, and I was really glad to be able to reach out as part of a prayer ministry. For me, it was very helpful."

Reported Mrs. Haight, "Usually we get an answering machine two times out of three, but this time, almost everyone was home. Everyone appreciated the connection."

The callers discovered that "the events of these past weeks weave in and out of our personal lives," she said. For example, one person asked prayers "for all my friends in New York, and for Grandma, who is in a nursing home," Mr. Haight said. Another, who'd struggled with a heavy workload for a couple of years, was feeling all the more weighed down by the September 11 crisis. Others asked prayers for innocent Afghans … for a friend who'd just been fired … for

hearts "open to what is occurring day by day."

Dr. Margaret Kornfeld, a pastoral counselor who addressed the National Council of Churches Executive Board in New York City on October 1, cited TeleCare as a good example of existing ministry "infrastructure" that effectively meets needs in extraordinary times. She urged religious leaders "to find out what's already working in your communions" and build on it in response to the current crisis.

Mrs. Haight said she was really glad TeleCare was already well established before September 11. "If we had thought now to set up TeleCare, it might have felt intrusive at worst and odd at best. In each round of calling during the past three years, people have become more familiar with it.

"The first time we called, we were explaining what TeleCare was. Each time, there has been more acceptance of TeleCare as a way of communicating." With the September 11 crisis," she said, "there's been another jump in people's openness. They've been broken open by anxiety and needing help, and are more willing to talk about it and to ask for prayers."

She added, "I don't want people to think it's a really big thing. It's low maintenance. That's the nice part. It's how I think we ought to live – checking in with people in your community. Its beauty is in its total simplicity and lack of presumption."

-end-

About the National Council of Churches
NCC Home Page