

Caring for Aging Catholic Parents: Balancing Love, Faith and Respect

Having the opportunity to care for your parents as they age is a privilege that comes with any number of challenges. Navigating the practical, emotional and spiritual aspects of caregiving can sometimes feel like a burden that we are not equipped to shoulder. Of course, there are normal issues that come with aging, but there may also be any number of other things to contend with from complex decisions about healthcare to managing relationships with friends and even other family members.

When Faiths Don't Align

Caregivers who do not share the same faith, values and traditions as their parents may find it especially difficult to honor their parents' wishes while maintaining different values. Walking through this well requires empathy, compassion, a willingness to understand their faith and what it means to them, as well as an openness to hearing their needs and set aside differences for the greater good.

If your parents are Catholic, it's important to understand that they find solace and strength in the sacraments, prayers and rituals of their faith. As a caregiver, you may be called upon to facilitate access to sacraments, daily prayer and to honor various feast days. Arranging for regular participation in Mass, Confession and the Eucharist, creating a peaceful environment to pray the Rosary and celebrating Catholic holidays bring them joy and comfort during what is likely a difficult season.

But how do you prioritize your parents' spiritual needs at a time when the demands of their physical and psychological needs are likely high; especially if you don't share their faith?

Integrating Faith into Their Daily Lives

Inviting a priest or deacon to visit your parents regularly, to offer them spiritual counsel and administer the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick when needed can be a great first step. These moments may provide much-needed comfort and reaffirm their connection to God.

Building a routine can also help. Consistency is key for elderly parents. Create a daily schedule that includes time for prayer, meals, medication and leisure activities. Incorporate moments of reflection and gratitude to reinforce their spiritual well-being. Remember that aging can bring feelings of isolation or anxiety. You can help them to combat these emotions by carving out quality time to spend with them. Be intentional and engage in meaningful conversations and activities. Encourage visits from friends, family and even fellow parishioners. And don't forget, keep involving them in family decisions to make them feel valued.

Generational differences in faith practices can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. Approach these moments with respect and patience, focusing on shared values rather than differences. Be sure to discuss their wishes for end-of-life care, including preferences for medical treatments, sacraments and funeral arrangements. Document these decisions to ensure their desires are honored.

A Journey of Love and Grace

Caring for aging Catholic parents is a journey that demands love, faith and respect. By integrating their spiritual needs into your caregiving approach, you provide not only physical care but also the emotional and spiritual support that reflects their deeply held beliefs. This sacred responsibility is a testament to the enduring bond between parent and child and the power of faith to guide us through life's most meaningful challenges.

Planning ahead can bring comfort and clarity for the entire family. The Orange Catholic Foundation has several Catholic resources that will help you navigate important conversations with faith and confidence, including a [FREE legacy planning guide](#) and a Catholic Advanced Health Care Directive. Our philanthropy team is also available at 714.282.3021 or info@OrangeCatholicFoundation.org.

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