

# A Comfort Cushion

*A gift of prayer and care for a person who suffers due to mental health issues affecting their life*



*To console does not mean to take away the pain but rather to be there and say, “You are not alone, I am with you. Together we can carry the burden. Don’t be afraid. I am here.” That is consolation. We all need to give it as well as to receive it.*

Henri Nouwen – *Bread For The Journey*, February 9

Feeling alone in our suffering is an awful burden. The outreach of *A Nouwen Network* helps to lift some of this burden for those whose lives are affected by mental health issues. *A Nouwen Network* is ‘a Spirit-directed, grassroots network of diverse church communities’ which was established in Queensland in 2009. Network members offer acceptance and friendship. We find ways to reach out and connect with those who are isolated. Since early 2011 copies of our *prayer card* have found their way to hundreds of people through being gifted directly and being made freely available in foyers. The *prayer card* is a powerful means of reaching out and saying “We will walk with you, and God walks with you. You will not go through this alone”.

In March 2012 *A Nouwen Network* realized a long held dream when it began the *Comfort Cushion* project as yet another means of connecting and offering support. The *Comfort Cushion* project is a ministry of tenderness and prayer. The *Comfort Cushion* is 20 cm x 20 cm (8” x 8”) with a pocket into the back to hold a small card with a prayer and/or *A Nouwen Network prayer card*.



The cushion expresses something of the prayer and care that we long to give to those who are very unwell, and those who are most isolated:

*May God’s love guide you, uphold you, protect you and enfold you.  
May the ‘God of all comfort’ become your refuge and strength as you recover,  
and may the prayers of others help in some small way to bring comfort to you.*

When possible we give a *Comfort Cushion* to people who are inpatients of psychiatric wards and community care units. However, as hospital beds are hard to secure, and many who are very unwell are treated as outpatients, we also give these cushions to people who are at home. Those who live alone or in hostels are a priority, but pain and loneliness can be savage despite the companionship of a loving family. Our *Comfort Cushions* are being gifted wherever a network member feels the Spirit prompts them to take one. At times this outreach extends to a family member of a person with a mental health issue. Many suffer greatly when their loved ones are hospitalized, unwell, or out of contact with them. They are often exhausted and feel quite alone.

The generosity of a small number of prayerful craft persons has allowed us to gift cushions at a steady rate. The embroidery on many cushions has been of a very high standard but this is not a benchmark for participation. Every cushion is unique, and the recipient is prayed for as it is made. They have all been very beautiful. We need diversity – cushions for young people, and cushions that will appeal to men as well as women. Some stunning cushions have been made using applique rather than lots of embroidery. There are many fabrics available that have restful, comforting images on them that are great applied onto the front panel of a little cushion. (We had no trouble finding homes for some that had images of cats, birds, farms and seascapes stitched onto them. Cushions with some bright geometric shapes went quickly also).



**Please help us to continue this outreach.** Give some thought to whether you, or somebody you know, could prayerfully create a little cushion or two for *A Nouwen Network* to give to a person whose life is affected by mental illness. Alternatively if the Spirit prompts you, you may pop a card in the cushion pocket and give it directly to somebody yourself!

## *How to make a Comfort Cushion*

You will need:

- 1 piece of fabric for the front of the cushion 23cm x 23cm (9" x 9"). This may be decorated in whatever way you wish. Your choice of embroidery, appliqué, quilting, cross-stitch candlewicking or patchwork etc. may be used.
- 2 pieces of cotton fabric:
  - 1st: 23cm x 23cm (9" x 9")
  - 2nd: 17cm x 23cm (6 ½" x 9") hemmed along one 9" side
- polyester stuffing

After completing the front of the cushion, tack hemmed pocket onto the back of the cushion. Join front to back of cushion with pocket in between and using a ½" seam. Leave an opening at the top. Trim seams and corners, turn out and insert stuffing. (You may wish to make a stuffed cushion insert the same size as the cushion to use).

During the time that you are creating the cushion, please pray, in whatever way you choose, for the recipient. If it is possible, we encourage you to include the words "love" and "peace" on your cushion. (Use a method of your choice). The words can be placed on either the front or the back of the cushion.

N.B. You may choose to mail in cushion covers without polyester stuffing, or if you don't have a sewing machine or are unable to complete the cushion, you may forward the completed front of the cushion.

The patterns for the *Comfort Cushions*, and the pdf for the *prayer cards* can be found with the Resources on **A Nouwen Network's Blog**:  
<http://nouwennetwork1234.wordpress.com>

Please direct enquiries to:

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***A Nouwen Network is a cross-denominational outreach.***

*...we need to be angels for each other, to give each other strength and consolation. Because only when we fully realize that the cup of life is not only a cup of sorrow but also a cup of joy will we be able to drink it.*

Henri J. M. Nouwen from *Can You Drink The Cup*