

# Listen

The first prayer at the Vigil for the Deceased States:

“My brother and sisters,

We believe that all the ties of friendship and affection which knit us as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death.

Confident that God always remembers the good we have done and forgives our sins, let us pray, asking God to gather N. to himself”.

As we enter the month of November, a month in which we remember those who have died, let us remember this opening prayer. The deceased are an integral part of our lives and have made us who we are today.

Let us pray this month in a special way for our chaplaincy family, and those who have gone before us. That their souls may rest in peace and their family’s may grieve with the hope of eternal life.

## Jesus, I trust in you

*Jim*

***Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.***



## “Grieving During a Pandemic”

Article used with permission. <https://www.brighamandwomens.org/covid-19/grieving-during-a-pandemic>

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has upended our daily lives and routines in a matter of a few short weeks, generating uncertainty and anxiety. For the majority of the population, coping at this time is extremely stressful as we adjust to staying home and distancing ourselves from others. It is especially challenging if someone you loved has died during the pandemic, whether or not their death was a result of COVID-19. If your loved one has recently died, we offer these suggestions for grieving during this incredibly difficult and isolating period.

### **Acknowledge that we are in a different time**

Doing so helps to manage our expectations of ourselves and others.

- Living in a pandemic has changed so much of how our society functions, including our day-to-day lives, how we care for the sick, how we care for the dying and how we care for the bereaved.
- Our sense of control has been challenged at all levels.
- Routines and rituals that normally bring comfort aren't readily accessible, which can increase feelings of isolation and loss.

### **Understand the Nature of Grief**

This is important, as grief is far more complex than many people think.

- When a loved one dies, grief is characterized by deep sadness and a yearning to be with the person who died.
- Grief is also a normal reaction following other types of losses, such as being diagnosed with a serious illness or losing one's job.
- Grief typically follows a wave-like pattern, which tends to ease over time as people adapt to their changed circumstances and regain a sense of control in their lives.
- Grief is unique - there is no 'right' or one way to grieve.

### **Give Yourself Permission to Grieve**

This creates the space to acknowledge the different emotions that come with loss.

- When someone you love dies, it is common to experience a range of emotions. These emotions may include sadness, anxiety, loneliness, regret, anger and guilt. You might find that some of these emotions are even more intense right now.
- Replaying events and going over details are a normal part of how we try to make sense of something. It's likely that you will have many questions and perhaps few answers.
- During this pandemic, our society has had to make many changes to keep everyone safe. As a result, there are likely to be many other losses that need to be mourned, such as not being at the hospital when a loved one died or not being able to sit Shiva or hold a wake and funeral.

# Listen

## **Create a Daily Routine**

This is always important when grief is new as it provides a structure to your day. Routine is even more important during a pandemic.

- Try to get out of bed at the same time each day.
- Try to eat at regular meal times.
- Plan your day in "chunks" of time for meals, exercise, tasks related to your loved one's estate or death, work and connecting online with family and friends.
- Write a daily to-do list and check off items as you complete them, such as attending to administrative tasks or sorting through your loved one's belongings.
- Carve out time to grieve. Being sad is normal when you are grieving, and it's important to give yourself permission to be sad and to acknowledge the other emotions you might be feeling.

## **Focus on Your Self-Care**

This is something grief experts always recommend because of how stressful grieving can be.

- Practice increased hygiene, especially hand-washing with soap.
- Try to eat even if you don't feel like it.
- Where possible, avoid processed foods.
- Limit your alcohol intake.
- Exercise as part of your daily routine. Consider an online exercise or yoga class.
- Try an online meditation app.
- Keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings and list any questions you have.
- Limit your media exposure at this time.
- Please seek medical advice if you think you may have COVID-19 or have been exposed and are at risk.

## **Check Your Thinking**

This is important because how we think affects how we feel and what we do.

- In very stressful situations where we don't have a lot of control, our thinking can often make us feel more distressed and upset.
- If you're aware that you're feeling increasingly strong emotions related to your loved one's death, such as guilt, anger or distress, ask yourself: *What am I thinking?* or *What am I telling myself about what happened?*
- It can be easy to blame ourselves even when there is no evidence for doing so.
- To check your thinking, ask yourself: *How would I advise a friend in the same situation?* or *What would my loved one say if they were here now?*
- It often helps to write down your thoughts and your answers to the questions above and try to stick to the facts.

# Listen

*By Sue Morris, PsyD  
Clinical Psychologist  
Director Bereavement Services  
Dana-Farber Brigham Cancer Center*

- It can be helpful to remind ourselves and others: *We are in a pandemic that has caught the entire world by surprise. Difficult decisions had to be made for the health of our society as a whole, which were beyond the control of any individual.*

## **Reach Out for Support**

Staying connected to your family and friends is especially important.

- Keep in touch daily using technology with your family and friends even if you don't feel like it.
- Call your doctor's office and schedule a virtual visit.
- Arrange a call with someone from your spiritual or religious group.
- Consider joining an online support group.
- Make a virtual appointment with a grief counselor, especially if you feel overwhelmed or have little support.
- Call a national hotline.

## **Adapt Rituals**

You can still honor your loved one in different ways during this time.

- Plan a "virtual celebration of life" where friends and family members can come together, to share pictures and reminisce.
- Consider writing your loved one a letter or leaving them a voicemail. You can tell them how you feel, especially if you were unable to say a proper goodbye.
- Make a playlist of their favorite music and share it with others in their memory.

## **Plan for Post-COVID-19**

Making plans helps us feel more in control.

- Make a 'to-do' list of tasks that you will need to complete when the restrictions ease.
- Plan a memorial event or service for your loved one if you weren't able to during the pandemic.
- Consider attending a support group for bereaved families who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- If you have unanswered questions for your loved one's medical team, you might want to write them down and consider contacting the team at a later date to arrange a meeting.

For more information about coping with grief, call the Bereavement Program at 617-732-6646.

*This document is for informational purposes only. The content is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.*

## “Grief/Bereavement”

**W**hen I received word that we would be sending out a November bereavement-themed newsletter, I began my writing prep as I always do; by doing a ‘brain dump’. Basically, I let my brain wander down the path of whatever the theme may be and write the words and phrases that come to mind. This particular brain dump went something like this: November...bereavement...All Souls... those who have died...died...Lynne died...nope, too personal... Stop.

So, I switched gears and moved on to my next go-to: Evidence Based Practice. As nurses, we rely on research to guide our practice, and after 3 years in the DNP program, the phrase “Conduct a literature search” is as second nature as breathing. Well, not quite, but it’s still a good place to start. The terms grief and bereavement are often used interchangeably, even though they mean different things, so I’d like to differentiate between the two: Grief is “the anguish experienced after a significant loss” (American Psychological Association, n.d.). and “Bereavement is the period of grief and mourning after a death”. (Medline Plus, 2021).

Next, I searched ‘bereavement’ and ‘faith community nursing’ which yielded three articles, one of which was a narrative account of a bereavement presentation held at the Westberg Institute Educators Retreat in 2017. Attendees of the presentation were guided to “reflect on personal losses to gain understanding and appreciation for the lessons learned as a result of dealing with specific losses” (Jacob, 2017, p. 8). The article did not really open my eyes to any new revelations about grief or bereavement: I already knew that loss takes many forms, people process those losses in their own unique ways, the standard year of grieving after a death doesn’t miraculously heal the bereaved, people don’t ‘get over’ the loss of their loved ones, and with sufficient time and support, bereaved people can adapt to a ‘new normal’.

What struck me about Jacob’s article was the focus on Faith Community Nurses, who are the ideal members of the faith community to support the bereaved, because caring for wounded people is part of our role as nurses. We have the education and the opportunities to hone the skills needed to support others through their grief. Jacob used the word ‘journey’, which of course grief is. It’s a journey through a period that is often confusing, chaotic, and foreign. It is hard, it is exhausting, and it is isolating. But what really struck me was that the retreat leader directed the FCNs to explore their own losses, promoting the idea that those who understand loss are better positioned to support others who are grieving. The FCN’s were encouraged to make meaning of their own losses, to better minister to their congregants.

Within our Christian faith, particularly in our Catholic tradition, we have some beautiful rituals to help us on our journey through bereavement. Faith community nurses can minister to our parishioners before, during, and after these rituals, by engaging in some simple, practical activities:

# Listen

By Karen Wenger, DNP, RN, Faith Community Nurse

## **Acknowledge and process your own losses.**

**Be present- reach out**, and not with the standard “Call if you need anything...”. YOU make the call. If calling makes you nervous, write a note, email, or text. In the past few years, several friends have experienced crushing losses. When I wanted them to know I was thinking and praying for them, but didn’t want to be intrusive, I would text: “No need to reply; just want you to know that you and the family are in my thoughts and prayers. I am here”. This takes responsibility for action away from the bereaved. I don’t say “I am here, call if you need...”. I simply offer myself. I have been told that the simple knowledge of my presence is comforting.

**Listen** and allow the bereaved person to say whatever they need to say. Whatever they need to say. So often a response is neither necessary nor helpful.

**Speak** the deceased person’s name. Tell the bereaved person a story about their loved one- a favorite memory, a song or flower or place or TV show or whatever makes you think of the deceased person. Do not be afraid that by speaking of the deceased person you will be reminding their loved one; the deceased person is rarely far from their loved one’s thoughts. You will not make the bereaved person sad; rather they will be happy that someone else is thinking of their loved one.

**Pray.** There are so many prayer options for grief and mourning and bereavement. Ecclesiastes 3, 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, Revelations 21:4, Psalm 34:18, Psalm 147:3, John 14:1, for example.

**Encourage art, music, and poetry.** I am partial to the works of John O’Donohue and found his poem, “On the Death of the Beloved “ especially comforting.

Circling back to my ‘brain dump’, you may be wondering about ‘Lynne died’ and ‘nope, too personal’. After reading Jacob’s article, I understand that while ‘Lynne died’ is personal, it is okay for me to acknowledge this personal loss so I can better minister to others. Lynne was my oldest friend; she died in March from metastatic breast cancer. She died estranged from the Church, requested ‘nothing religious for postmortem rituals, and thus had only a secular wake. As a result of ‘nothing religious’, I was very unsettled in the months following Lynne’s death. People speak of ‘closure’ after the funeral rites, and while I don’t know if we ever actually ‘get closure’, at the very least the rituals help to put grief into some semblance of order. In recent years, we have experienced an increase in secularism, and a decrease in faith-based events, such as funeral Masses. My own personal loss has taught me that when parishioners are deprived of our comforting rituals, they can experience spiritual and emotional discomfort. FCNs can and should use interventions like the ones listed above to help parishioners through their bereavement period.

*Continued on next page*

10

## *Grief Journal Writing Prompts*

- 1 THE HARDEST TIME OF DAY IS...
- 2 I'M REALLY MISSING...
- 3 MY SUPPORT SYSTEM INCLUDES...
- 4 I REALLY NEED MORE...
- 5 I'M HAVING A HARD TIME WITH...
- 6 I FIND IT HELPFUL WHEN...
- 7 I FIND IT DIFFICULT WHEN...
- 8 SOME OF MY GRIEF TRIGGERS ARE...
- 9 I AM GRATEFUL FOR...
- 10 MY FAVOURITE MEMORY OF [YOUR LOVED ONE'S NAME] IS....

# Listen

*By Karen Wenger, DNP, RN, Faith Community Nurse*

## References

- APA Dictionary of Psychology. (n.d.). <https://dictionary.apa.org/grief>
- Filz, G. (2017). 20 Ways to pray for the Holy Souls in Purgatory. The Catholic Company. <https://www.catholiccompany.com/magazine/20-ways-to-pray-for-the-holy-souls-in-purgatory-6154>
- Jacob, S. (2017). The Hidden Lessons of Loss. Perspectives, 2017, (Fall), 8-9 [file:///C:/Users/wenger\\_k/Documents/Jacob%20grief.pdf](file:///C:/Users/wenger_k/Documents/Jacob%20grief.pdf)
- O'Donohue, J. (2008) On the Death of the Beloved. In J. O'Donohue. To Bless the Space Between Us. Penguin Random House, LLC, New York
- USCCB. (2021). Select readings. <https://bible.usccb.org/bible>
- US National Library of Medicine. (15, September 2021). Bereavement: also called grief. Medline Plus. <https://medlineplus.gov/bereavement.html>

# Listen

The Office of Chaplaincy Programs invites you to use this resource.



Please feel free to use  
these grief support  
resources from the  
Paraclete Press Grief  
Video Streaming  
Collection.

---

[paracletevideostreaming.com](http://paracletevideostreaming.com)

Username: ChaplaincyProgramsGrief

Password: Deaconjim21-22



PARACLETE PRESS

# Listen

## Additional Resources

[Bereavement | Archdiocese of Boston \(bostoncatholic.org\)](#)

[Death and Grieving | Catholics Come Home](#)

[Grief Resources | Loyola Press](#)

[Surviving the holidays: tips for grieving individuals - The Catholic Messenger](#)

[Catholic Books on Grief and Loss | Ave Maria Press](#)

[The Catholic Cemetery Association, Inc. - Links and other resources](#)

[Some Good Resources on Grief and Loss \(phillycatholiclife.org\)](#)

[Bereavement and Funerals | USCCB](#)

[Helping patients cope with COVID-19 grief \(apa.org\)](#)

[We don't "move on" from grief. We move forward with it \(Nora McInerney | TEDWomen 2018\)<BR><BR>https://www.ted.com/talks/nora\\_mcinerney\\_we\\_don\\_t\\_move\\_on\\_from\\_grief\\_we\\_move\\_forward\\_with\\_it?utm\\_source=tedcomshare&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=tedsread](#)

[https://www.catholiccompany.com/magazine/20-ways-to-pray-for-the-holy-souls-in-purgatory-6154](#)

[The Bereavement Caregivers SelfCare Guidelines.pdf \(massfda.org\)](#)