

Bethany Bereavement Support Group

Annual General Meeting January 31st 2009

Arrival and Mass: On the Eve of Bridget's Day over 80 members of the Bethany groups from around the country braved the cold and wind to arrive in Milltown Park for our Annual General Meeting. It was good to renew acquaintances and to greet newcomers. Mass was celebrated by Fr. Myles O'Reilly, our Spiritual Director, and we remembered in prayer those who had died during the past year especially Bethany members and their relatives.

Business of the day: Reports were efficiently given by the Chairman, Frank O'Hara, Secretary, Mary O'Callaghan and Treasurer, Moira Staines.

Speaker: After tea our guest speaker, Sean Brophy, inspired us with his life story and his Haiku poetry. The stillness in the room while he spoke was a witness to how deeply the audience was touched. We then spent time in small groups sharing our responses to his story and to his Haiku poetry. People spoke of the stark, deep imagery, and of how their souls were touched by it.

News from the West: Later Sister Mary Glennon described the way Bethany is spreading

to several parishes in Galway and other counties through the courses organised in Esker Retreat House in Athenry.

Changes on the General Executive Council: Having given generously of their time and skills for the past three years it was time for two members of the Executive, Jo Fitzgibbon and Eilish Goulding, to move on. As there were no nominations for election two people were coopted for the coming year: Noel McEvoy and Gobnait O'Grady.

Presentations were made to Jo and Eilish in appreciation of their service to the organisation through the GEC. Sr. Sheila was welcomed back to the Bethany after her recent time of ill health, and finally a presentation was made to the outgoing Chairman, Frank O'Hara for his unstinting generosity in guiding the organisation through the past three years. He was given a glass tear drop holding another inside; he was deeply moved by the beautiful symbolism involved in this, and we are told it has pride of place in his home! We are glad that Frank can stay on the Executive as an ex-officio member for the coming year!

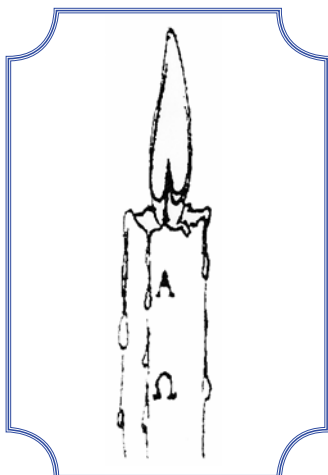


Sean Brophy signs his book "Elegy and other poems" for Frank and Fr. Myles.



Winnie and Frank welcome Sr. Sheila back to active ministry with Bethany.

Closure: The Annual General Meeting of 2009 ended with a celebratory lunch at 2.00pm. Appreciation was expressed to Milltown Institute for its hospitality and efficiency.



Review of the Annual General Meeting

The feedback submitted by members was carefully considered at the first meeting of the new Executive, and the committee members added their own evaluations. There was general agreement that the event was very successful and well organised. Changing the Mass time to the beginning of the day was welcomed, and the careful timing of each section helped keep the event running smoothly. The catering staff was congratulated for their cooking, courtesy and efficiency, and the guest speaker was considered a great gift to us.

Awareness of the difficulties of early morning travel, especially from the West was acknowledged. Various options will be considered when planning for next year's event, such as beginning later, or suggesting that people plan to arrive after the Mass. A cup of tea or coffee is always welcome on arrival; again we will explore this possibility, while recognising some logistical problems!

Thank you for your support and feedback. This will help us prepare well in advance of next year's AGM.

The Bethany Bereavement Residential Weekend

The Bethany Bereavement Residential weekend took place in Orlagh Retreat Centre from

Friday 20th to Sunday 22nd February 2009 and seventeen people attended. The participants were all ages and came from all walks of life with the common link of trying to come to terms with their grief and loss.

As in the past it was marvellous to see the support of the participants for each other and to view their journey over the weekend. The general feeling was one of optimism and hope for the future.

Although the weekend was

tinged with a little sadness knowing that this would be the last weekend to be held in Orlagh for the present. Orlagh is not available from June 2009 and the future is a little uncertain. However I am quietly confident that this is only a temporary situation and look forward to the day we return.

In the meanwhile the next Residential Bereavement weekend will be held in Manresa Jesuit Retreat House, Clontarf Road from Friday 20th November 2009 to Sunday 22nd November 2009 and further information will be available later in the year.

Anne Butler.

November Orlagh Weekend



Fr. Myles O'Reilly SJ relaxing with Sadie Meade after an intensive day of facilitation in Orlagh last November.

Members of the General Executive for 2009:

Myles O'Reilly SJ (Spiritual Director), Winnie Keogh (Chairperson), Moira Staines (Secretary), Noel McEvoy (Treasurer), Anne Butler, Mary O'Callaghan, Gobnait O'Grady, Frank O'Hara, Marion Reynolds SSL, Dermot Rogan, Gerry Ryan.

For further information please contact: Bethany Bereavement Support Group, c/o Rathfarnham Parish Centre, Willbrook Road, Rathfarnham, Dublin 14.

Bethany Phone: 087 9905299

Email: bethanysupport@eircom.net

Website: www.bethany.ie



Notice Board.....

Training Day for facilitators; in Monkstown Parish Centre on Saturday 16th May 10am to 4.00pm. A limited number of places still available. Apply to Gobnait O'Grady 087 2052177

Date for your diary:
Fr. Pat Murray will lead a day on Christian meditation on 26th September 2009. Further details later.

Open Day: Bereavement Counselling Services of Ireland on Saturday 25th April in Trinity College, Dublin. For further information phone: 01 8391766 (9.30am to 1.00pm Monday to Friday).

The next **Residential Bereavement weekend** will be held in Manresa Jesuit Retreat House, Clontarf Road from Friday 20th November 2009 to Sunday 22nd November 2009 and further information will be available later in the year.

AGM reviews:
Please send your review of the AGM to the GEC as soon as possible, if you have not already done so.

The **new contact list** is enclosed with this Newsletter. The colour for 2009 is cream. Please discard all others! For extra copies please apply to the GEC.

Excerpts from Sean Brophy's talk at the AGM



Sean Brophy

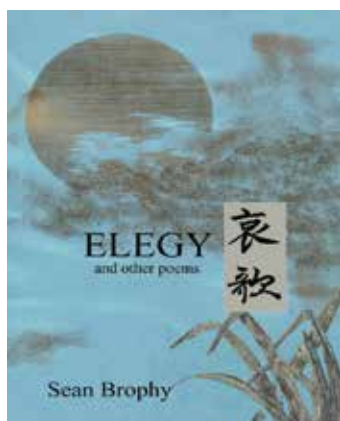
I used writing as a therapy for the great loss of my wife, Emily. What had I to celebrate when she died? I tried to move quickly from "How awful that she should have died" to "How fortunate that she should have lived". So, I wrote a book of poetry entitled 'Loving Emily' that celebrated her life but barely touched on my sense of loss.

Afterwards I realised that I was in denial. I hadn't really acknowledged my feelings and dealt with my grief. Having read Elizabeth Kubler-Ross on the five stages of grieving I gave labels to my own grieving process – bittersweet love, soul pain, grief observed and prayer for acceptance. The start of the year 2002 was accompanied by a feeling of optimism within myself that I had not felt for nearly three years. I was developing a greater capacity to live in the present moment aided by daily periods of meditation. Living in the present assisted me in maintaining a real sense of spiritual connection with my partner, free of the wistful loss of the past or of the anxiety of that loss in the future.

I began to write haiku poems at this time. This is a seven centuries old Japanese form of poem, traditionally but not exclusively written as three lines of five, seven, and five

syllables respectively. A haiku, like other forms of poem is intended to express and evoke emotion. These tiny poems are packed with meaning, normally in the present tense. Their subject matter is normally Nature, especially the seasons, but can embrace all of life. They typically gain their effect not only by suggesting a mood but also by conveying a clear picture to the reader that serves as a starting point for trains of thought and emotion. Because of their brevity, they are short on detail, leaving the reader to fill in the entire scene for himself or herself.

I published a collection of my poems called, 'Elegy and other poems'. This book is not the story of my life, rather the stories of grief writ large and small from my life from the spring of 2002. Readers may be bemused, entertained or just mildly interested in my doings. My aim is none of these. Rather, my wish is that the reader will find his or her own face there, find himself or herself blown into a world of excitement, terror, confusion, searching for love, lovemaking, yearning, soul pain, desolation, joy or tranquillity. My hope is that at least one poem will resonate with some readers, that will swell their hearts and perhaps stimulate them to write the poems of their own lives. My hope is that they may experience the peace and tranquillity that comes from healing oneself, even if one's grief is so profound as to require the support of a skilled therapist.



Emily

February snow...
The first time we noticed
Our eyes meet in love

Stretched in a deck chair
Sun bronzing your pretty face_
Straw hat hides your pretty hair

Knitting pretty coats...
Countless babies, other than
Those we never had

In San Francisco...
Staring over golden Gate
All your dreams come true

Your silhouette...
There is no one quite like you
Thanks for loving me

You make love to me
Like I was our own violin_
Sweet cadenzas

Bitter-sweet

Sentenced to die
I cry in anguish for your fate_
We cannot make sense

Thirty five years...
Love creates a bond that can't
Be broken, replaced

Our wedding day leaves
Me bittersweet memories_
Fortified for life

You sit in bed one day
Crying, because of what your
Dying does to me

What do you want me
To remember about us_
Everything, you say!

Dying breath expires...
My hand, warm in your armpit
Cold seeps through your frame

Soul Pain

Grief is crushing
Distorting my judgments
Twisting my instincts

Soul is in torment
I loved you, nay love you still_
The pain in my soul
May mean we are connecting
Or ripped apart

Soul Pain continued...

Help me God to join
Again two souls connected
Since the dawn of time

Waves of anguished
Pain wash through my
shaking body_
Tears flow down my face

Trembling I cry out
To you my only love, you
Have abandoned me!

Prayer for acceptance

Help me Lord Jesus
To name my feelings, to own
And not project them

Onto innocent
Others, to stay reasoned
In my judgments

Keep me alert to
Bogus rescues, misguided
Tries to heal myself

Help me Lord Jesus
To declare myself healed
So I can move on

Close my eyes
To unhelpful distractions
That add to my pain

Give me the peace of
Your infinite presence
Each hour of my life

Elegy

I see moon and stars...
While they are set in heaven
You stay in my mind

Swan and her cygnets
Mother smiling at her child
Lover and his lass

Stream runs to river
Dolphin tumbles to shore
Mountains kiss the sky

Until I can see
Limits of the universe
You are in my heart

Sean's next book
"Touching the Infinite -
Haikus on compassion"
will be available at Easter.

Words from Winnie Keogh, chairperson

It is a great honour to chair the Bethany organisation. I hope and pray I will serve you and those to whom you minister as faithfully as possible. I work with ten others on the Executive Council, and I am indeed privileged to have the support of such a dedicated group. We meet formally once a month for two hours, and on other occasions as the need arises. Your concerns are central to our work, and we like to hear from you. More and more parishes are sending people for Bethany training, and we are very pleased to do all we can to facilitate these. People sometimes ask us about ways to spend their grant money. You may find it helpful to buy some of the CDs, 'The Grieving Journey' so that you can offer them on loan or as gifts to the bereaved. It is also good to have a good supply of books available. Veritas and Cathedral

Books have great selections. We also encourage you to organise talks on various aspects of bereavement. Sometimes a few neighbouring parishes find it helpful to do this together. This is another way to spend your money!

We sympathise with Nancy McDermot, Killucan on the death of her brother Kieran and to Marian Connell, Foxfield who lost her grandson, aged 17 yrs in an accident in England. We send best wishes to Sinead McCreevy, Killcullen who is very ill at the moment.

If possible bereaved Bethany Members should stand down from ministering to the bereaved for a year and be supported by the group. Remember that those who care for others will themselves need care at vulnerable times.

We would love to hear from you. Perhaps you would write an article for our next newsletter! Sharing your experience with others may help them to

do something creative to overcome a difficulty!

In the meantime we ask for God's blessing on your ministry of compassion and love. As you leave your comfortable home to go out in the cold and rain on your Bethany ministry know that you are supported by all those who are doing similar work, and you are appreciated by those to whom you listen in ways you may never know.

Thanks

Thanks to the many parish groups who have returned their annual reports to the General Executive. This information is of great use to us as we try to coordinate the work and needs of the overall organisation. If you have not already done so, please accept this as a reminder, and know that your input will be welcome!

Setting up a Bethany Group?

If you know of Parish Council which is considering setting up a Bethany support Group we will be happy to visit them before they make a final decision.



Winnie Keogh

This will enable them to get clarity about the structures and the training. For further information contact Winnie at 4943142

Recommended Reading for bereaved children

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley (London Harper Collins, 1994)

Best Friends: Holly and Jake going through life changes together by Ann Keating (Dublin: Our Lady's Hospice)

Remembering Mum: Ginny Perkins and Leon Morris (London: A & C Black)

River Boy by Tim Bowler (Oxford University Press)

Moira Stains was inspired to write the following after hearing Sean's presentation on Haiku poetry.

Death of my mother
10 February 2003

Death of my Aunt Bridget
1 February 1980

Snowdrops

St. Bridget's Day

The snowdrops peeping
The days are lengthening
Spring starts to appear

February snow
How cool it falls
What memories it brings

The one who treasured
These little white gems
Saw beyond a valley of hope

St. Bridget's Day
The candle flickered out
The soul took flight to that bright light

Her wish to die
When they flourished
Was worship to God above

She was a child of Bridget
Her birthday to celebrate
To heaven she went

For he took her home
When they were abundant
What grace to treasure

A carpet of white
We trespassed on
To church and graveyard still

I see them peeping
I see her smiling
What beauty revealing.

But memories do not fade
We live in hope
Of that brighter glade.

The Grieving Journey CD



Personal stories, reflections, and practical suggestions for times of grief.

Cost: €10.00 (plus €2.00 for postage)
Order through GEC, contact details are on page 2.