

Bethany Bereavement Support Group

My Story of Grief

I considered myself a rather shallow and unemotional person as I grew from childhood to mature adulthood. Perhaps the strongest emotion I felt was homesickness when I went to boarding school in 5th year and in Paris when I was an au pair, both moves having been instigated by me, I should add. When my Parents died I was married, with children, teaching full time, and living away from home in Dublin. I was sad but not devastated as their loss was not a daily grief.

In 1990, four days after her fourteenth birthday, my daughter Aoife was struck by a car on a wet summers day. We watched her struggle for survival in Beaumont I.C.U for a little less than a week. We feared, hoped for a while, and then she was gone. It truly was as if part of me was ripped out.

Aoife was a very sensitive girl with a beautiful spirit that lit her face, she was deeply touched by a radio program her father had done about organ donation and spoke firmly about her wish to be a donor.

While the process was horrific for us as the organs were harvested from our little girl, the saving of three lives made some small sense of this unnatural loss.

One of the cruellest, but also one of the most healing things, is that life goes on. Our three children needed the care and attention of their parents. It was their first experience of bereavement and we had to help them through it. Jobs had to be returned to, on the surface, at least, business as usual. Close and extended family, colleagues and friends helped during the day, but sleepless nights were spent reliving each moment, from the neighbour calling with news of the accident, the sight of her on the pavement, uninjured apart from the cracked skull and the blood seeping from her ear, the ambulance ride, the anxious and endless waiting, the front of brain hope and back of brain, unacknowledged, fear.

Time eventually eased the pain and we do love our angel in heaven that the thoughtless but sincere lady congratulated us on a few days after the funeral. In 1998 my husband Eamonn ran the Dublin city marathon and a week later, the New York marathon. He complained of back pain on returning and put it down to his recent exertions. The pain got worse and in January '99 he was admitted to the oncology ward of St Vincent's Hospital.

As they tried to track down the source of the cancer the various procedures and treatments took their toll rapidly and I watched my handsome and vigorous husband fade away to be replaced by a skeletal octogenarian. He



was finally released from pain on May 6th '99. Anticipatory grief meant that there was no surprise at this death but that does not mean that there was no shock. This was a total lifestyle change; my future would now be a solo venture. There was fear as well as grief. Of course I was not alone and the same blanket of love and support was given to me again as I faced this new chapter in my life.

When we survive major grief, we access our deepest feelings and endure the pain they cause, but we can grow stronger from this to cope with anything life has to throw at us. We all faced up to the challenges of day to day living and gradually the pain eased and a sort of acceptance was reached.

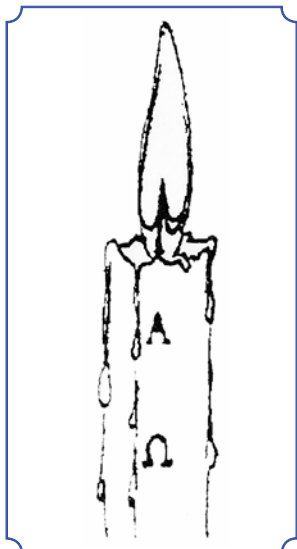
But life was not finished with us yet, and in 2007 my son's partner, the beautiful and sensitive Marion, died by her own hand. He had loved her deeply and his overwhelmed despair was heartbreaking to see and plunged us all back into the pain and sorrow of all our losses. The unemotional person I thought I was had long ago disappeared.

Being a part of Bethany has helped me greatly to make

sense of the suffering, to try and deal with the feelings it has aroused, to determine where those feelings come from, and to deal with them. It has also allowed me the opportunity and the privilege to support others in their grief, and in this way travel further along the road of healing. The training I received during the Monkstown course of 2006, the year of my retirement, helped me to relive many aspects of my grieving and to make sense of them as I hadn't before. To talk more and more openly to like-minded people under the direction of trained personnel freed up my emotions and allowed me to unblock many barriers that I had raised for my protection and initial survival.

The Orlagh bereavement retreat weekend, which I attended in 2008, continued the process as I accessed a deep pool of anger that I hadn't been fully aware of. I felt as if a wall I had constructed around me was finally removed but I was left bereft and confused with a need to confront the source of this anger. It took a while but now I think I am further along the road of full acceptance.

Deirdre Ó Muiri



Keynote Lecture Annual General Meeting 2010



Dr. Helen Greally

Dr. Helen Greally of Cancer Care West gave an inspiring presentation of her work with cancer patients and their grieving families. She spoke of her research in how best to help those who are suffering either anticipatory grief after a cancer diagnosis or grieving the death of loved ones. She offered many insights which challenge some of our assumptions about bereavement.

The wake as an alternative: The Wake is a positive option

which is growing in popularity with people who feel it lessens the intensity of grief and is less depressing than the funeral home.

a) the family feels more in control.

b) friends can relate their stories.

c) the bereaved can tell their stories.

Death takes away certain assumptions:

1) *Life is predictable:*

It is not and the shock adds to grief.

2) *We are in control:*

we are not in control of death or illness.

3) *Our life is permanent:*

In spite of the evidence, we think we will not die.

Assumptions:

It is often the ending of our as-

sumptions in our relationship to the deceased that we grieve and our grief is therefore unique. Who is the chief mourner? It is not always obvious. We must never judge the bereaved and this will allow them to be more open.

Grieving is not an illness, good days may suggest recovery but full recovery does not necessarily occur.

Denial:

The ability to deny is huge and protects the psyche until it is ready to face the harsh realities of life. Do not try take away denial but rather make the journey at their pace.

Stages of grief:

New studies suggest that the stages of grief are not linear but can crop up at different times

and become very mixed.

Avoidance:

The bereaved often find that people avoid them and this is very hurtful. People need to tell and retell their story to make it believable and bearable.

The lecture was followed by a useful small groups workshop on how do the assumptions about grieving we bring to our ministry affect your work with the bereaved?

Discussion of this question led to lively feedback from the groups as they shared their comments, insights and experiences.

Gobnait O'Grady thanked Dr. Greally for her excellent presentation.

News Flashes.....

Our Lady Queen of Peace group Bray celebrates the 20 years of Bethany ministry of Doreen Roche and welcomes Sam Veale as the new Co-ordinator. The group reports a satisfactory increase in drop in attendance and house calls in the last year and a very successful November Mass.

Reflection Day

8th of May 2010,
Spiritual Director,
Fr. Flan Lynch.

Venue:

Clonliffe College
Clonliffe Road
Drumcondra
9am to 4pm
Fee per person €20.

To defray the cost of running the Executive, the Treasurer asks for a donation of €50 from any group which has sufficient funds.

A Bethany training course will commence on Thursday 23rd September 2010 in Monkstown. We remind members that parish or group sponsorship is available for training courses. Contact Gobnait 087 2052177 or Liz 087 2392465.

We welcome any notices or articles from Bethany groups throughout the country for publication in forthcoming newsletters.

Groups should also remind the bereaved that retreat weekends may be sponsored.

The Bethany Bereavement Residential weekend

The Bethany bereavement retreat took place in the Orlagh Retreat Centre from Friday 26th to Sunday 28th February 2010 and seventeen people attended. Booking was slow initially but the momentum grew nearer the weekend and we would like to thank the groups who encouraged and persuaded the participants to attend. 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. I reproduce here an extract from a letter received from one of the participants:

"I am writing this letter to say a heartfelt thanks to yourself, to Father Myles and to all the facilitators at the residential Weekend.

I felt that I should write to you so as to give you an idea of what you gave me over the weekend.

The understanding and support shown to me by the members of my group was superb and demonstrated to me their genuine concern that we were all there to help one another through the different stages of

our own individual journeys.

I think it is opportune that I pay a particular tribute to Fr. Myles. He was superb in everything he did and said.

He shows enormous understanding and his expertise was evident to see.

I found it difficult to leave the weekend. It was like leaving a newly discovered family whose members were of different ages, different background and with different needs but with the one critical common objective of making that journey together and helping anyone who stumbled a bit on the way.

I hope these inadequate words of mine convey my appreciation to you and your colleagues."

His words are anything but inadequate and probably convey much more eloquently anything I might say.

The next Residential Bereavement weekend will be held in November and further information will be available in the autumn edition.

Anne Butler

Bethany Bereavement Annual General Meeting

This years AGM was very well attended, with groups coming from all over Ireland as the Bethany movement becomes more nationwide. The 135 members started queuing for registration by 8.45 and were just in time to settle in their seats for the opening Mass, celebrated by Fr. Myles.

The Chairperson, Winnie Keogh, welcomed everyone and announced that the agenda would be changed to allow Dr. Helen Greally to make her presentation first. Dr. Helen founded Cancer Care West to help cancer patients and their families to deal with their anticipatory grief and eventual bereavement. The lecture was fascinating and opened new insights into our ministry to the bereaved.

The members then broke up into groups of 10 to discuss the topic "How do the assumptions about grieving that you bring affect your work with the bereaved?" The discussions were lively and led to interesting feedback from many groups.

The Secretary's report

This was read by Anne Butler who started by calling for a minutes silence in memory of Mary O'Callaghan, secretary for the last 3 years, who died during the year. Ar dheis De go raibh a h-anam dilis.

It was a busy year with 11 GEC meetings having a quorum so that the work of coordinating Bethany could go

ahead. 4 training courses were held in Dublin, the coordinators were gratefully thanked. 2 courses were held in Athenry for 6 new Bethany groups in the West. Congratulations to Sr. Mary Glennon and the teams in Carndonagh, Barna, Gurteen, Mullingar, Moycullen and Glenamaddy and godspeed. 5 new groups were also set up in Dublin. A new training manual has been completed by Frank O'Hara, which will be invaluable to the training coordinators. Two bereavement weekends were held last year the February one in Orlagh and November one in Manresa.

Noel McEvoy had to resign as treasurer and was replaced by Ronan Hughes.

A new look Bethany website (www.bethany.ie) has been designed and set up, free of charge by FMC Design. Warm thanks for all the hard work.

Frank O'Hara and Sr. Marion Reynolds will not be continuing with the GEC, they will be sadly missed.

Treasurer's Report.

Ronan Hughes introduced himself and his report with an expert series of PowerPoint overheads. The costs of running Bethany and all its facets are greater than its income from sales and training fees etc. The FSA grant may be curtailed due to the financial situation, therefore a donation of at least €50 was requested from each group.



Chairperson's report.

Winnie Keogh spoke on 4 main issues:

1. The Child Protection Policy. Detailed work has been done by the church, especially the Dublin Archdiocese, on the CPP and as it affects volunteer groups in the parishes, it affects Bethany as we are Parish based. Bethany should not have a separate policy, but adhere to and support the parish policy.
2. Changes are being made to the Bethany constitution to update it and make the wording more accessible. This will include a mission statement, the old and new forms were displayed on overheads.
3. Winnie introduced the new website and thanked FMC Design for their generous work in setting it up.
4. A support forum will be set up for Bethany support members. Your email

addresses/mobile numbers will be needed for this to operate properly. Later a forum may be set up for the people we are supporting.

Fr. Myles introduced Mary Brady's wonderful book "Time without You". The book is about her journey of grief after the death of her beloved husband which she illustrated with artwork and poetry. The book was partially funded by Bethany and published by Messenger Publications.

A short second workshop followed discussing Bethany topics.

Finally election for three places on the GEC resulted in three nominees being elected. At last it was time for lunch which was served in the Milltown restaurant by a friendly and efficient staff, who coped very well with the larger than usual numbers.

Members of the General Executive for 2010:

Myles O'Reilly SJ (Spiritual Director),
 Winnie Keogh (Chairperson),
 Moira Staines (Secretary),
 Ronan Hughes (Treasurer), Anne Butler, Brendan Nugent, Mary Mason, Deirdre Ó Muiú, Gobnait O'Grady.

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



Bethany in Newtownpark

In spring of 2005 one of the priests in our parish asked for volunteers to start a bereavement support group. The first meeting was held in Father Bill's house and following from this three of us, from the assembled group, volunteered.

The following autumn we started our Bethany training course as support people for a new Bethany bereavement support group and when we had finished Fr. Bill blessed our new endeavour with a commissioning service after 12 o'clock Mass on Sunday. From the outset we must give credit and sincere thanks to Winnie Keogh who was always there at the end of the phone at any time to give helpful and always sound advice. Without you, Winnie, we would not have come this far. We must also mention the training course in Monkstown which was wonderful and run by a great group of people.

We held our first meeting in the New Year and we have been liaising with bereaved people since then. Our format is this: through the parish weekly news letter we invite people who are suffering grief from loss to come and talk to us at a given time and venue and we listen to them, with a sympathetic ear, for an hour or so once a month. We also call to the homes of the bereaved 2 to 3 months after the death of their loved ones. If we do not get a response at the door we leave a card saying that we called and that, should they need us, to contact us on our dedicated phone number. (Our cards were designed and printed by one of our own Bethany group members.) We have also sent people we considered suitable i.e. more than 18 months bereaved, on the Orlagh bereavement weekends which proved very beneficial in most cases. Some of our own members have par-

ticipated in this weekend and it is a good refresher course as well as very healing.

Each month, following our support group session, we hold our committee meeting to discuss ongoing problems and listen to suggestions for the improvement of our service. As we now comprise 6 members the chairmanship is rotated on a monthly basis and a yearly rota of members, to facilitate at the public meetings, has been drawn up. This allows for continuity for clients as each member does 2 months in a row and a returning client has the benefit of knowing at least one facilitator.

We try to upgrade and improve our service as we go along and find that we learn a great deal when we interact with other groups at the A.G.M. in Milltown. Their experience in solving difficulties like ours is invaluable. Currently we are reassessing the value of the "listening service" or drop in meeting, as the numbers attending fall far short of our expectations. We are also re-evaluating our system of "cold calling" and have come up with a letter which we will post to the next of kin announcing a call at a specific time and date but allowing the person to call and rearrange or cancel the visit. At this time and given the age profile of the bereaved we feel this approach would be less frightening and therefore more acceptable than a cold call to the hall door.

We are also discussing the new role of our members as we become involved in funeral ministry at the request of our parish priest. Some of us on the committee are not overly enthusiastic about taking on this role but we do believe that it is, and properly should be, within the remit of the Bethany bereavement support group and not administered by any other group. Sometimes we feel we are not reaching those who need us and this contact at funeral time

might be more productive. Conversely, we are not in a position to push our services on any one, particularly as we are dealing with very vulnerable people at such a difficult time in their lives. Our wish for the coming

year is that more of those who need us would seek our help.

Siobhan Morgan
Newtownpark Parish
Bethany Group

Scripture Quotes:

I myself taught you to walk; I took you in my arms,
Yet you...did not understand that I was the one looking after you.
I led you with reins of kindness, with leading strings of love.
I was like someone who lifts an infant close against his cheek;
Stooping down to you,...I gave you your food, how could I give you up? (Ho. 11:3;4;8)

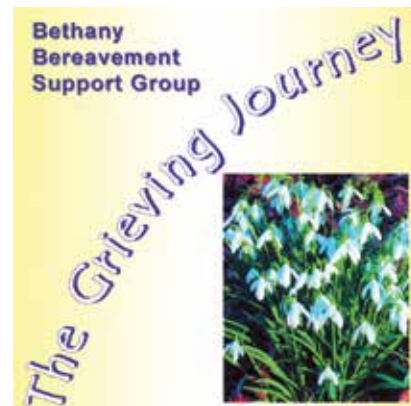
I will betroth myself to you forever,
Betroth you with integrity and justice,
With tenderness and love;
I will betroth myself to you with faithfulness?
And you shall come to know Me. (Ho. 2: 19-22)

In your old age I shall be the same still,
When your hair is grey I shall still support you.
I have already done so, I have carried you,
I shall still support and deliver you. (Is. 46:4)

I have gone to prepare a place for you, and I shall return to take you with me, so that where I am, you, may be too.
(Jn. 14:2-3)

You have a sure hope, and the promise of an inheritance that can never be spoiled or soiled and never fade away, because it is being kept for you, in the heavens. (1P.1:4)

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 3.