



BETHANY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP

A time to heal my frozen grief

It was during the training in Bereavement Ministry with Bethany this year that I became aware of my own grief around my brother's death. I experienced physical pain in my chest and numbness in my legs. As C. S. Lewis wrote in *A Grief Observed*.

"Grief is like a bomber circling round and dropping its bombs each time the circle brings it overhead; physical pain is like the steady barrage on a trench in World War One, hours of it with no let-up for a moment". (p.36).

I was 2 years old when my brother Andy died following a tragic road accident; he was 7 at the time and the eldest child. He died on the 17th of December 1959 and was buried on the 21st; four days before Christmas. Over the years I have thought about my parents and how they ever coped. My mum seemed so far away at times, Dad was more able to engage

with us. I spent a lot of time with my grandparents where I experienced a great sense of warmth. Over the years I learned from relatives what happened on that dreadful day. I was not able to comprehend back then the enormity of it all and the effects unexpressed grief can have on the family. This experience of death so early in my life left me with this terrible fear, at times I could feel this fear in every cell of my body. When I got married and had my own children, I projected this fear onto my son. Sometimes I could be watching a film and a child would be experiencing pain and the fear within me would surface. I would feel this terror that something awful was going to happen to my son. I thank God that I had some awareness that these feelings had nothing to do with the present rather they were from my past but invading my being in that moment as I struggled to understand them.



As C.S Lewis writes, *"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing"* (p.5).

In March of this year my sister and I went in search of Andy's grave. My mum could never bring herself to visit the grave as it was too painful for her. Before she died I promised her I would find the grave. The week before we went to the graveyard I had a dream, in this dream Andy was guiding me to his grave and gave me information that helped me locate where he was laid to rest. Whoever said there is no afterlife, I beg to differ. I believe Andy knew how important it was for us to heal so he helped us along the way. It was a special moment for both of us when we found it. I felt a joy in my heart as I bent down and picked up some clay from his grave saying, we found you Andy. My heart was filled with different emotions as I reached out to hug Patricia. I then went over to Mum and Dad's grave and expressed my forgiveness for my lack of understanding of

their pain. As Lewis wrote, *"Never, in any place or time, will she have her son on her knees, or bath him, or tell him a story, or plan for his future", (p.24).*

Afterwards Patricia and I sat over coffee talking about the effect Andy's death had on our lives. Not only did we find Andy's grave that day, we also found a lost part of ourselves. During the following weeks I got in touch with anger, deep sadness, confusion and resentment. All these feelings were trapped in my body and at times over the years manifested in illness and physical pain. Being able to express these emotions in a safe caring environment was important for me; it gave me the freedom to be myself.

I am so grateful for the Bethany training and all the people involved, including the people who were training with me. Their hugs, care, compassion and understanding has helped me to heal and process the grief which I held for so long in my body around my brother's death. Thank you all.

Bridget Malone

Balbriggan Bethany Support Group



Members of the Balbriggan Bethany Support Group receiving a certificate to recognise their contribution to the community, awarded by the Balbriggan Town Council.

L to R: Anne O'Keeffe, Ita Kilmurry, and Fidelma McGarry. The Group, who meet on the 2nd Tuesday of the month, have 6 facilitators and always welcome new volunteers.

The 20th Bethany A.G.M. 15th February 2014

We had a very well attended AGM with 150 delegates from all over the country present. Moira welcomed everybody after which the meeting was convened by the secretary Maeve Mason. Fr. Myles celebrated Mass during which a moving service of Light took place to commemorate the members and relatives of members who died during the year. Fr. Myles gave us extracts from the Joy of the Gospel by Pope Francis to encourage us in the service to "the other" and in particular those bereaved.

Our guest speaker was Brid Carroll who spoke on helping those bereaved by suicide. It was a very clear presentation delivered with skill and compassion which helped delegates to consider how we might deal with this very difficult issue. She spoke of the importance of accompanying the bereaved in their shock and sadness. We can also help them deal with the stigma which surrounds these deaths. It was a most thought provoking presentation.

The minutes of the 2013 AGM were read by Maeve Mason which were proposed by Winnie Keogh and seconded by Moira Staines

The treasurer's report was presenter by Anne Butler who



Barbara O'Hanlon a new member of Bethany from Sandyford Parish who provided the music for Mass at the AGM.

detailed our main expenses. Our operational costs include the expenses of holding the AGM, the newsletter, insurance, stationary etc. We also have the costs associated with the provision of other services such as training, Books, Orlagh weekend, day of reflection. Whilst these are all of enormous benefit there is a shortfall in costs. The GEC is very grateful for the donation of €50 towards helping to defray those costs.

The secretary's report was read by Maeve Mason.

11 monthly meetings took place.

Training was held at Monkstown, Clonliffe, Drumalis and Esker.

Information meetings to cluster groups were held in Blackrock, Putland Rd. Bray, Newbridge and East Wall. The 5 module programme was discussed and encouraged at these meetings.

Very moving prayer services were held in several parishes including Rathfarnham, Guardian Angels Blackrock, and Dalkey. A trainers meeting was held in July at which 10 trainers and coordinators were present. They represented all 4 provinces of the country.

A Day of Reflection was held on 27th April at Clonliffe College. Our speaker was Fr. J. Cogley. He is a grief counsellor and a maker of wonderful wooden objects which he uses to symbolise ideas and emotions.

Many GEC members attended the funeral of Mary Brady in May and also of Sadie Meade in December. In November Fr. Myles celebrated the Eucharist in thanksgiving for the work of Mary in updating the history of Bethany.

The Orlagh weekend was held in November and attended by 20 people. They were all very appreciative and found it a deeply moving few days.

Chairpersons address.

Highlights of 2013

- Sadness at deaths of Mary Brady, Sadie Meade.



Presentation to Deirdre Ó Muiri at AGM in gratitude for her time on the GEC both as Secretary and Coordinator of the Newsletter.

We thank Deirdre for her great contribution to the work of the GEC and are happy to know she remains a member of Newtownpark Bethany Group.

- Sympathy to Fr. Myles on the recent death of his sister Barbara.

- Welcomed new groups at Carrick-on-Shannon, Kells, Sandyford, Clover Hill Prison, Portstewart, Randalstown, Glenavy, Glenravel.

- Congratulated Clair Dowds who is continuing to spread Bethany in Northern Ireland.

Sr. Mary Glennon in the West who is growing from strength to strength and spreading as far as Donegal.

Thanks to Sr. Dolores and her team for their success in Mallow.

Priorities for the coming year

- Development of skills in reaching out to the bereaved by means of workshops in facilitation.

- Implementation of the 5 module programme for group meetings.

- To visit as many groups as possible over the coming year.

- Completion of Code of Ethics and Guidelines.

- Training in matters with regard to Child Protection and Compliance.

Dates for 2014/5 calendar.

Day of Reflection led by Fr. Brendan Comerford on Sat 26th

April at Clonliffe College. He will speak on the topic of Inspiration from the Mystics.

Orlagh week-end will be held on 21st/23rd of November. Please sponsor people from parishes and new members wishing to join Bethany.

Guidelines

- Work has been on going. We must conform to new guideline on issue of Child Protection. A day will be set aside to ensure that all members understand the basics.

Nomination and election to GEC.

Sam Veale;
Jean Cleary;
Tony Malone.

Finally sincere gratitude was expressed to all members of the GEC and Trainers. Deirdre Ó Muiri is retiring and we are very grateful for her years in compiling the newsletter and as secretary. She received a bouquet of flowers as a parting gift (photo above).

After this, the meeting concluded and nearly all those present adjourned to the dining-room and enjoyed lunch and chat together.

Coping with a Bereavement after a death by Suicide

Brid Carroll, who has had many years of experience in dealing with all types of grief counselling, gave us a most informative and helpful presentation on the above topic at the AGM.

1. She detailed the ways in which Bethany members could feel somewhat confident in dealing with persons bereaved following suicide. We can accompany them in their journey and help them recover despite the difficulties which surround these deaths. Due to the circumstances there is intense communal shock and grief reactions are magnified. There are numerous unanswered questions and unfinished business. The bereaved whole assumptive world has been shattered.

2. The "why" of the death is the big question:

- Why did they do this?
- Why could they not have told anyone?
- Why were they angry with me; us; were they not thinking of the impact it would have on us?

3. The survivors need to tell and retell their story. They are grieving for their shattered dreams. It takes time to get the death in perspective. The story needs to be reframed gradually.

4. Family relationships can be greatly affected. Some may feel that there is a conspiracy of silence and secrecy. Children in particular may overhear adults conversation and reach their own distorted conclusions.

5. Bethany members can help the bereaved by allowing them to tell & retell their story and by providing a safe place in which to express their feelings.

6. Media intrusion may often add to their grief. Legal issues can also increase their distress by the slowness of the process. They need constant reassurance that they can come through this grief. They need help to remake

a sense of life.

7. Professional help may be needed when the bereaved continue to feel numb months after the death, when they cannot sleep, eat, handle the panic and are overwhelmed by guilt and rejection.

8. Even after professional help is received Bethany members can still accompany those bereaved by suicide, as they find their new normal and continuing bonds with the bereaved.

9. Brid's final reflection:



Brid Carroll

"I had thought that your death was a waste and a destruction but the fact of death cannot destroy what has been given. I am learning to look at your life again. Instead of your death and your departing"

"Living with Loss"



On the 1st November the Irish Hospice Foundation hosted an evening in the Alexander Hotel, Dublin 2. The purpose of the event was to give free information on grief and the range of supports available to bereaved people. The speakers included Mary O' Rourke and John Lonergan. It was a very informative evening. Liam and Claire Dowds from Bethany Northern Ireland joined Winnie Keogh and Moira Staines at the Bethany Stand at the event.

Dates for the Diary....

Day of Reflection 26th April 2014

'Inspiration from the Mystics' Fr. Brendan Comerford SJ.
Venue: Clonliffe College.
Registration: 9.30am.
Day of Reflection: 10.00am to approx 3.00pm.

Next Training Workshops:

Dublin at St Patrick's Hall Monkstown.

From Thursday 18th September each evening @ 7.30pm.
Final full day Saturday 6th December.
Interviews 11th September.
Further details from Liz Ronaldson.
Email: ronaldson6@eircom.net or mobile 087 2392465

Galway - Esker Retreat Centre

3rd - 5th October and 7th - 9th November.
Contact: Sr. Mary Glennon 087 3204569
Email: mbglennon@eircom.net for further information.

Northern Ireland

Contact: Claire Dowds Tel: 00447766934246
Email: cdowds181@gmail.com
September to December. Dates to be advised.

Compulsory Training on Child Protection for all Bethany Members

4th October 2014 @ Clonliffe College 10.00am - 3.00pm.

Orlagh Weekend for the Bereaved

22nd to 24th November
Please contact Anne Butler for booking & further information.
Tel: 087 2050514
Email: annebutler@live.ie

Team Building in Northern Ireland

Pastoral renewal invites all of us to contribute to the life of our parish and wider church community. Bethany Teams are doing that. Their work and commitment creates a link between faith in action, worship and gospel.

Bethany teams are an example of how the people of God – laity, clergy and religious – can be co-responsible for responding to God's word – in this case to comfort those who mourn. They will visit the bereaved family and offer sympathy and support from the parish community.

This can be described as a practical example of Living Church, where people in a parish share responsibility, with their priests, for the needs of the people of the parish.

As part of the training, we look at Team Building. We take a group of individuals who are committed to a common goal - Bethany Bereave-

ment Support and after reflecting on the First Letter to the Corinthians 12:14-26,

"As the body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many are one Body, so also is Christ" we ask the group where they see the fruits of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In Galatians 5:22 we read *"What the Spirit brings is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control"*, yet many of us find it hard to see the evidence of Christ present within ourselves. We are more likely to think of others as showing God's love, until asked the questions:

As a member of the Body of Christ are you:

The Brain

the person with ideas – the clear thinker?

The Ears

the person who can listen?

The Mouth

the person with words of kind-



Bethany NI Core Team with Bishop Anthony Farquhar at the Final Day of the 6th Course.

Left to right: Br. George Gordon, Josephine O'Neill, Gerry Cassidy, Marie McGuigan, Bishop Farquhar, Claire Dowds and Liam Dowds

ness and/or challenge?

The Backbone

the person who is reliable and stable?

The Eyes

the person who sees what is missing, what is needed?

The Shoulder

the person who provides a shoulder to cry on?

The Hands

the person who offers practical support?

The Feet

the person who can go the extra mile?

The Heart

the person who can cry or laugh when needed?

These answers bring out a great diversity of skills and experience and undiscovered

gifts and talents of individual members which may surface, enabling the group to work together and maximise each others contribution as they become their parish Bethany Bereavement Team.

Since the Bethany Training came to the North of Ireland in 2011 twenty four parishes have sent teams for training. In addition, the course which is currently running has volunteers from eight of those parishes who wish to join their parish groups. Bethany Bereavement NI continues to expand in the Parishes of the Diocese of Down and Connor and will continue to grow in response to the needs of the North.



Pictured above are Olive Goff, Helen Sheridan and Moira Staines

They Led the Way: For the past twenty two years, Teresa Gilligan and Helen Sheridan have faithfully accompanied the bereaved in St Benedict's Parish, Grange Park, Edinmore and other parishes in the area. They were the forerunners and pioneers in providing this ministry in the emerging and developing Parishes in Raheny and surrounding areas. Many people benefitted from

their dedication and commitment during those years. Many more hold them in high esteem and recall with deep gratitude their supportive presence and generous availability in their journey through grief. As Bethany members in the area pay tribute to their pioneering work, their example will continue to be both an inspiration and a challenge. We wish them many blessings in the future.

General Executive Committee 2014

Fr. Myles O' Reilly - **Spiritual Director**

Moira Staines - **Chairperson**

Maeve Mason - **Secretary**

Anne Butler - **Treasurer**

Jean Cleary, Phil Crowley, Winnie Keogh,

Gobnait O Grady, Liz Ronaldson, Sam Veale.

(Unfortunately Tony Malone has had to step down. We would like to hear from others who can contribute to the work of the GEC and be co opted).

Bethany Bereavement Support Group contact details:

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Rathfarnham, Dublin 14.

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Email: bethanysupport@eircom.net **Website:** www.bethany.ie