

Bethany Bereavement Support Group



Susan Gamble

I trained as a Children's and General Nurse in the early 1970's and it always struck me how little time we had with our patients and their families especially at a time of bereavement. Over the last thirty years great strides have been made in this area, but the feeling of wanting to help in some way with the bereaved, never left me. I'm married to a Church of Ireland clergyman in Malahide and we have two grown up daughters who are flying the nest!

It was two years this summer that I investigated a bereavement course in the C of I to be told there wasn't one! However, in Malahide we have a

Ecumenical Bethany

very good relationship between our local churches and not to be put off, I contacted my friend from St Sylvester's R C to see if I could train through their Church and become a Bethany Member.

I have to say I was welcomed with open arms and felt completely at ease and accepted in everyway possible. As it happened I was not the only C of I candidate in the training group in Monkstown and she enjoyed the course just as much as I did.

When it came to being commissioned, I felt very strongly that both myself and Mary, who trained with me, should be commissioned together in St Sylvester's. That was eighteen months ago and to make it even more ecumenical my husband gave the homily! One of our recent members is Presbyterian, our Bethany Group is now officially, Ecumenical!

As you can imagine the C of I congregations are not as large as the R C's, at least not in the Republic. Our clergy organise funerals as they have the time to meet and arrange everything with the bereaved families, visiting them two or three times before the funeral and keeping personally in touch afterwards. I work as part of the Bethany team, visiting any family that is bereaved and who ask for our help, and when I am needed, helping families with the funeral liturgy for the Mass and being there at the service. When it is my turn, I am there to listen and comfort those who come to our monthly Bethany Support Group. Each year in November, St

Sylvester's invite all who have been bereaved in the previous twelve months to a special Mass to remember their loved ones, they also have a months mind. We in the C of I have a similar service once a year (no months mind). Last November we were assisted by our Bethany Group and borrowed some good ideas, including lots of candles not used in previous years. The extra attention to detail made all the difference to the service and was very

much appreciated.

I often think of the words from a hymn "And they'll know we are Christians by our Love by our Love, yes they'll know we are Christians by our Love" It doesn't matter what denomination, colour or creed we are. We will all grieve and need comforting when those we hold most dear are taken from us and being a Bethany member gives us the privilege of giving that support and comfort to all.

Untimely death of Mary O'Callaghan

We were greatly saddened by the untimely death of Mary O'Callaghan on April 6th last. Mary was secretary of the GEC for the past three years; many of you will remember her clear and concise reports at our Annual General Meetings over the years. Mary, who originally hailed from Bruff in County Limerick, gave herself unstintingly to many ventures, including the work of the GEC, the Bethany

training courses, and many parish events in Johnstown, Killiney. Her death came as a great shock to many people, and she is greatly missed. We extend our sympathy to her sons, Aidan and Kieran, and to her brother Vincent and his wife, Margaret.

May her dear and generous soul rest in great peace. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam dílis.

Members of the General Executive for 2009:

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

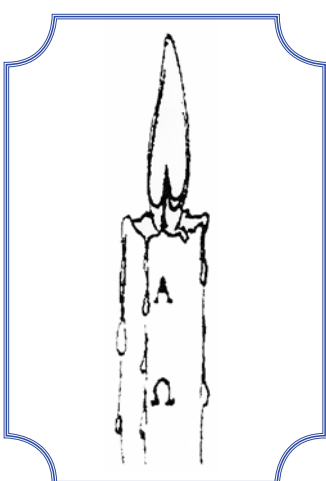
For further information please contact:

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c/o Rathfarnham Parish Centre, Willbrook Road, Rathfarnham,
Dublin 14.

Bethany Phone: 087 9905299

Email: bethanysupport@eircom.net

Website: www.bethany.ie



Residential Weekend for the Bereaved

The next Residential Bereavement Weekend will be held in Manresa Jesuit Retreat House, 426 Clontarf Rd., Dollymount, Dublin 3 from Friday 20th November 2009 at 7.30p.m. to Sunday 22nd November 2009 at 4.30p.m. The cost will be €180.00 per person to include accommodation and meals. The weekend is open to all



bereaved persons. The only condition is that the loss must be in excess of one year. We would ask you to encourage the people who are attending your groups to go

on the weekend and as far as possible for your group to either fund the cost in full or part. The feedback from the people who have attended in the past is that it has helped

them enormously to come to terms with their grief and loss. Further information is available from Anne Butler @ 087-2050514

Notice Board.....

Changes on the Executive General Council: For personal reasons Noel McEvoy has resigned from our Executive. We thank him for his commitment and generosity in the few months he was with us. In spite of this short time Noel's presence with us was a great gift, and we were very sorry to see him leave. We wish him well in all his endeavours. Ronan Hughes from the Rathfarnham group has been co-opted onto the GEC, and has taken up the role of Treasurer. We welcome him and thank him for his generous spirit.

Training Course.

Our next 12 week training course will be held in Monkstown Parish Centre. It runs each Thursday evening from 8.00pm to 10.00pm starting Thursday 24th September 2009. It finishes with a full day on Saturday 5th December. Interviews for places on the course will be held in Monkstown Parish Centre on Thursday 10th and Thursday 17th September from 6.30pm. – 8.00pm. For further information or application forms contact: **Gobnait O'Grady: Mobile: 087 2052177 or gobnaitogrady@eircom.net**

Volunteers needed

If you are a Bethany member and willing to be part of a rota to facilitate a group of bereaved people on Tuesday mornings from 11.00am to 12 noon beginning on September 15th please contact Winnie at 01 4943142 or 087 9341781.

We recommend that two or more local groups join to organise public talks on various aspects of bereavement over the coming months. Reports on such ventures have convinced us of the value to be derived by those who grieve from listening to a good speaker and meeting people in similar situations. This may be a useful way of using your grant. Breffni McGuinness (phone 01 6730064) who works with the Irish Hospice Foundation will be happy to supply names of resource people to suit your situation; and Fr. Myles O'Reilly is also available as a speaker.

Deaths

Please let us know if any member of your group (or a family member) dies. They will be remembered at the Mass during our AGM in Spring.

Reflection Day

Fr. Flan Lynch will lead us in a day of reflection
Date: Saturday October 3rd 2009
Time: 9.30am to 4.00pm
Venue: Our Lady Mother of the Church Parish Centre, Beech Park Avenue, Castleknock, Dublin 15
Cost: €20 (including a light lunch)
The day will begin with Mass at 9.30am
Please apply to Gerry Ryan at 087 2027644 by September 15th.

The Grieving Journey CD

Our beautiful CD has been very well received by many people who are struggling with grief. We have been told how helpful it is to listen to the stories of others at this painful time, and the listening can be done in the privacy of one's home or in the car. We have had requests for it from all over the world. At present we have about 400 copies in stock, and suggest you send for them for events such as public talks or the November Service. We will order more should the need arise. See our advertisement in this newsletter for further details. (page 4)

Rest in Peace

In our last Newsletter we asked you to pray for Sinead McCreevy who was seriously ill. Sadly, we now report that Sinead has since died. We offer our sympathy and prayer to Sinead's family and friends. May she rest in great peace.

Bethany and Funeral Ministry

How well is your Parish reaching and serving the Bereaved?

In recent years many people who trained as Bethany members have generously extended their ministry to help families prepare for the funerals of their loved ones. Other parishioners, at the request of their clergy, have attended Funeral Ministry training provided by the Diocese, and help solely with the funeral liturgy, while Bethany members are available to minister to the bereaved in the ensuing months, and often years. We

see these two ministries, while being separate, as closely intertwined, and we in Bethany are happy to explore and support in any way the working together of these two aspects of ministry. We are aware that many parishes are currently considering the introduction of Funeral Ministry and are in dialogue with Bethany members about ways to best incorporate the Bethany and Funeral work. In recent months we have been hearing of dialogues between



the two aspects of the ministry. Please let us know how well your Parish is reaching and serving the bereaved. If you are concerned about aspects of these ministries in your parish

we would like to hear from you. We hope to exchange ideas with the relevant diocesan groups about this. So the more information we have the better!

Recently two groups described their experiences for us. We share them here.

Malahide.....

The group was started through the Parish Pastoral Council. In 2005 it was decided that the parish needed to form a Bereavement support group. The PPC found that the best type of training available was from Bethany. Eight parishioners agreed to train and by that Summer the parish Bereavement group was commissioned. Although some members were unable to continue, other parishioners have also trained since that time and today we have a group of 12 who serve in funeral and Bethany ministry in our parish. The idea of becoming involved at the funeral stage came from other parishes.

Before we started to serve, we invited several long standing Bethany groups to come and describe their model of service. At the time, our group found that the model being followed in Castleknock was most successful in reaching and serving the bereaved of their parish. In particular, we noticed that because they often served the bereaved families at the time of the funeral, people were more inclined to ask for their visits and to come to the support group. In other words, the funeral ministry gave them a natural introduction and was in fact vital to their work in reaching bereaved people. We therefore brought this model to our priests who were most enthusiastic when we proposed the above model of Bereavement service to them. They understood the importance of introducing our group to bereaved families at the time of bereavement. We agreed with them that when a death is announced, we hold back at first as the first person to visit the bereaved family is always the priest. During his visit, the priest explains to the family that there is a Bethany team available to support immediately. The priests have been given a list of our phone numbers as we have four teams and two spare visitors available on a rota basis. In about 90% of cases, the families agree to involve us.

The priest then gives us the name and phone number of the family and we take it from there. We usually give practical support by bringing a step by step explanation of the funeral symbols and a selection of readings which are contained in our Funeral Liturgy book. The families appreciate our service and we attribute our success as a group to the enthusiasm of our priests as they always encourage our parishioners to accept our service. In addition, the use of the Liturgy book means that the priest is given a completed Liturgy sheet before the funeral Mass which prompts him to call readers by name when inviting them to read from Scripture or to lead the prayers of the faithful for example. Therefore this model works well for all concerned, and one proof of this has been that at our recent volunteer night, a parishioner who availed of our services when bereaved has now decided to volunteer for Bethany training in Sept.2009.'

Castleknock.....

At the Bethany Annual General Meeting held in Milltown in 2005, Rosemary McDevitt, one of our members, outlined how we as a Bethany Group engage with the bereaved in our parish. After this presentation, the feedback was positive and indeed many groups since then have engaged with us and requested support to implement some of our practices in their own parish teams.

On the other hand, there were some who had difficulty and may have seen us as a funeral group. This was far from the truth of how we saw ourselves, and our ministry, as Bethany members.

We had experience that the open group invitation to the bereaved in the parish did not work. Either people were too shy, too private, or too intimidated to attend. The attendance was very poor and oftentimes nobody came. The difficulties expressed were the issues of child care, family commitment, night suitability, etc., not to talk about the fears of meeting strangers and breaking down in public. Confidentiality was also a major issue for some and these were some of the fears and issues people conveyed to us.

Let me explain how we manage our Bethany work in Castleknock with ten active members.

continued on page 4

Five Spiritual lessons of loss

Knowing that there are spiritual lessons to be learnt from loss will not eliminate the pain. These lessons will help us immensely when future loss enters our lives, and they will give us greater strength and deeper hope. They will give us courage to stay in the turmoil, to trust that we will survive. "You learn to gather your sore heart back to yourself again, this sore gathering takes time, you need great patience with your slow heart." (John O' Donohue in *Eternal Echoes*.)

A: We have an inner resilience....

We can draw on the power and strength planted in our spirit by the Creator. We have an immense inner reservoir of goodness and strength that we may not even realize is there,

until we experience a great loss. We need to believe in our ability to cope and to bounce back.

B: We need the gift of others....

Painful loss can push us off balance....it is then we learn how to receive. We slowly realize and acknowledge that we need others, that we cannot go it alone and be healed without help. We need the gift of others in the form of wise listening friends, providers of meals and childcare, and sometimes skilled medical persons. We need to lean on those who are stronger than us at that point, someone to trust with our doubt and confusion, someone to nourish our famished spirit, until we are able to feed ourselves again. "The loneliest wave of loss is the one that carries a loved one away towards death"

(John O' Donohue.)

C: Our faith can sustain us...

In the pain and loneliness of loss it may seem that God is very far away. We must go into that emptiness with bare faith, trusting that God's promises are true. "When you pass through the waters, I'll be with you..... because you are precious in my eyes and I love you "... Faith does not take away the pain of loss, but when we believe, faith encourages us to trust that we are held in Divine care during our loss time and that God will never abandon us. He is there surrounding us with immense compassion, though we may be experiencing anger towards Him and the rest of the world. "Your soul lingers around that inner temple which is empty now, save for the sad echo of loss" John O' Donohue.

D: Forgiveness is essential for Healing

With a loss, we may blame ourselves for things we did or did not do, or we may rehash old wounds from hostile relationships, or simply be angry with the world because things didn't turn out as we had hoped.... From the Cross in his pain, Jesus looked at all those who had caused his death and forgave them...Our forgiveness is nothing

as quick as this but eventually we need to move beyond our non forgiveness and leave the old causes of our pain behind. We make it very difficult for ourselves to move on, if the heavy chains of guilt, blame, hatred, anger and resentment, keep us bound to the past.

E: Painful loss holds the seeds of transformation....

The days of great loss, strangely, hold the seeds of future new growth and transformation. Transformation is always a process of Birth – Death – Rebirth, life through struggle to new life. Loss is a part of that journey, we cannot avoid it. What we can do is open ourselves to the unfolding process; something life giving will emerge. Cherish all that was, and the future holds the seeds of new growth. "The beauty of Loss is the room it makes for something new, it makes vital clearance in the soul" John O' Donohue.

"You will move through the grey valley of loss and come out again into the meadow where light, colour, and promise await to embrace you...." (John O' Donohue) p.248 (*Eternal Echoes*.)

Méabh Ni Uallacháin SSL

continued from page 3

- We engage with the clergy, both formally and informally and they now see us as a very positive support to their ministry.
- We have a roster and at our monthly meetings members nominate themselves and their availability to be on duty for a month at a time.
- We give the clergy a copy of the roster, with telephone numbers, to call us in the event of a death.
- The priest will let the family know that two members of the Bethany Bereavement team will call to help them in whatever way possible and this is the beginning of our journey with the bereaved.
- We bring with us on that occasion what is known as the "Black Book". This book contains a variety of readings, reflections and prayers, which families may find useful in preparing for the funeral. We spend as much or as little time with people on this visit as is necessary, supporting, listening and helping in whatever way we can, depending on circumstances. Most families are grateful for our practical support and understanding and depending on the need and engagement with us, we may return a number of times (or none) over these difficult days to help with the funeral and thus enhance our bereavement work with people right at the initial stage of grief.
- Further visits to the bereaved are made by arrangement, and telephone calls and texts are some of the other ways we keep in touch.
- Contact with all families who have been bereaved within the year is made before the Service of Light, held in November.

Please contact Gobnait O'Grady at 087 2052177 or gobnaitogrady@eircom.net if your group would like to contribute to the discussion.

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 1.