

# Bethany Bereavement Support Group

## Suicide and the Needs of the Suicide Bereaved.

On 30th April last, with Gonnait O'Grady, I attended a one-day workshop on 'Suicide and the Needs of the Suicide Bereaved', facilitated by The Irish Hospice Foundation. The purpose of the day was to give pointers and guidelines based on diligent and sensitive research. The workshop was attended by people from around the country involved in areas such as occupational therapy, psychotherapy, teaching, research and counselling. We discovered, however, that approximately one third of the participants were, like us, volunteer members of Bethany Bereavement Support Group.

The following are examples of what we explored during the day's training:

- Understanding Suicide: it challenges the value of life.
- Causal Factors: self image, entrapment, feeling a burden.
- Grief of the Bereaved: it goes beyond normal grieving.
- Responding to the bereaved:

need to identify their place in the bereavement eg. relative, friend, colleague.

### Grief beyond all other grief.

With the intentional taking of one's own life the grief of the suicide bereaved is always going to be 'grief beyond all other grief, 'grief that knows no boundaries', 'sorrow that goes beyond sorrow'.

In addition to the normal grieving process, the suicide-bereaved suffers additional reactions:

Trauma, Stigma, Horror, Isolation, Secrecy, Loneliness, Blame, Failure, Guilt, Regret, Anger, Shock, Explanations that search for answers.

In understanding suicide we are challenged in several areas - the value of life, our own individual lives and life in general. As suicide defies our cherished notion that all life is sacred, it creates unease and challenges our most deeply held beliefs.

The suicide-bereaved also have to face unavoidable events that weigh heavily on them such as funeral arrangements, investigation, post-mortem, inquest. Not alone do they struggle with their own grief and reaction, they also struggle with society's reaction. There can be people around them who may not be sensitive, they have to face the legal situation, loss of income, property and insurance matters.

Questions arise - will someone else seek to follow the same path?

*And perhaps most important of all, the spiritual question:*



*What has happened to their loved ones - are they saved? are they lost? Will they meet again?*

### Need for Forgiveness.

The suicide-bereaved can often struggle with feelings of anger at the person who has died - anger at having been propelled into such a public place, having to make funeral arrangements, convey the news, etc...

Sometimes there is resentment, a feeling that the deceased loved one has left and gone to a better place but those grieving have been left with a difficult situation to live in. They can find it very difficult to forgive.

### How Bethany approach may help

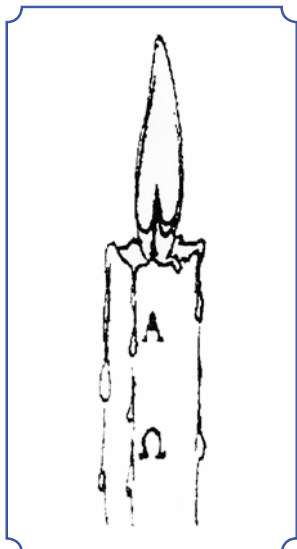
As we journey with those bereaved by suicide we are privileged to be with them in their Bethany place. When there is no one to understand, in Bethany there is. As we listen to the bereaved expressing their anger, guilt, fear, their awful pain of loss, we remember that Bethany is so named be-

cause Jesus, Mary and Martha met and grieved there at the death of Lazarus and it was at Bethany that Jesus restored life to Lazarus and in faith He will restore life to all who come to Him.

In Bethany there is no stigma, no social disgrace, no judgement. The suicide-bereaved are accepted just as they are, with no pressure to "get over" their grief - we know mourning of the heart cannot be hurried or rushed. As a Bethany volunteer, listening to the suicide-bereaved, it can help to remember we are in the company of Jesus who seeks to save, comfort, console the loved one who has died by suicide and whose heart He understands. He also seeks to save, comfort and console those bereaved by suicide and whose loss He understands.

*"His power to save is utterly certain, since He is living forever to intercede for all who come to God through Him" Hebrews 7:24-25*

*Carmel Roberts*



## Freedom to Forgive

*In May of this year, our Bethany Day of Reflection took place in Clonliffe. Over fifty members attended and found it an inspiring day. It was delivered by Father Flann Lynch, O.f.m .cap. who encouraged us to avoid the negative world of scarcity, struggle and guilt so as to embrace awareness of God's abundant life. He drew our attention to the importance of forgiveness in the grieving process and encouraged us to try the following sacred ritual as a way of finding inner freedom:*

No matter our difficulty in forgiving, or how deep seated our anger or resentment, we can take steps to achieve freedom. Hidden feelings are often the underlying cause of the difficulty. Find a good listener, someone you can trust, and explore these feelings, bringing them to the surface, making them conscious. A safe atmosphere is essential. Talk about your feelings and your fear of looking at them. Try to name the feelings. Keep talking and feeling as you try to make the feelings conscious.

A powerful and sacred ritual: Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Light a candle and spend a little while letting it speak to you of the presence of Christ the Light, helping you. Then

write spontaneously, allowing, your feelings to surface. Write whatever comes to mind. Do not reflect as you write or read over what you have written. Stay in touch with what you are feeling.

When you have written all you can, burn the page(s) from the flame of the candle. Let the ash fall into a wash hand basin with a white surface. Be aware of the flame of the candle representing the flame of God's love, burning away the poison of anger and bitterness, as well as healing your woundedness.

When the burning is complete turn on the tap and observe the water removing all the ash. Let the water remind you of the ongoing power of the water of baptism, cleansing you of the venom of bitterness and resentment you have written, as well as healing you and empowering you with the freedom of mercy and forgiveness. When all the ash has disappeared observe the white, clean surface of the basin. Let it remind you of how clean and pure you have become. Repeat this ritual daily until there is nothing more you can write. Do the exercise whenever old hurts resurface or new ones occur. Conclude with a silent prayer of deep reverence and gratitude to God.

*Adapted from book "Vision Companion"*

## The Gentle Lifestyle

1. Gentleness is thinking gentle thoughts about self, others, life and God.
2. Gentleness is feeling God's energy of gentle love filling one's whole being and flowing out to the world – we are fields of energy.
3. Gentleness is listening attentively to each person with God's energy of gentle love.
4. Gentleness is speaking gently so that what we say will build up and do good to others.
5. Gentleness is doing the loving thing as we work for a better and more just world.
6. Gentleness is making sacrifices (offerings made sacred by the motive of love) not only because love requires them, but also because love inspires us to make them.
7. Gentleness is the awareness and discipline to look after our well-being responsibly.
8. Gentleness is turning every difficulty and adversity into an opportunity.
9. Gentleness is making gratitude to God and to everyone a way of life.
10. Gentleness is resting in the comfort of Providence, empowering our stands, our lives and the affairs of the world.

Compiled by *Gobnait O'Grady*

*Adapted from "Vision Companion"*

### News Flashes.....

#### Bethany Training Course

12 week course, starting September 23rd 2010.

#### Change of Venue

The September Training Course will take place this year in St. John the Baptist Parish Centre, Blackrock, Co. Dublin. For further information and booking forms call Liz at 087 2392465

Interviews for places will be held on Thursday 16th and Saturday 18th September 2010.

#### Donation to GEC

Our treasurer Ronan wishes to remind those groups with adequate funds to make their 50euro contribution to the GEC as soon as possible.

**More News Flashes..... page 4**



# MINISTERING TO THE BEREAVED

'Hello Brid, I'm very sorry about your husband'. 'Thanks, I can't believe he's gone'.

'You feel like it's a bad dream' I didn't know this lady up until four weeks ago when I attended the 10am daily Mass. It was also her husband's funeral Mass. The Bethany training course teaches you not to cross the road to avoid a bereaved person and not to ignore the loss. The course and one's own experience gives one the confidence to be sensitive to the person's sadness and to offer care and compassion after bereavement.

Mary whose husband died after an illness of more than ten years duration says for her the loss was a profound life changing experience. Life had lost it's meaning, all the things she took for granted were gone. Frank was devastated by the loss of his young wife by cancer and was left with three young children to rear on his own. 'I was numbed, in shock and distraught. I had lost my best friend, my lover, my companion, my beloved and beautiful wife-Frieda. She had just turned 40. We had been so happy. I asked myself over and over again: why? why? why?'

Deirdre's story is of the death of her beautiful daughter Aoife, 4 days after her fourteenth birthday. She was struck by a car, on a wet summers day. 'We watched her struggle for survival in Beaumont I.C.U for little less than a week. We feared, we hoped for a while and then she was gone. It truly was as if part of me was ripped out.' Bereavement, grief and loss are different for everyone. In order to heal and not to be left with depression and a broken heart it is essential to talk and share your unique story with someone who will listen without being judgemental. That's the problem, who will listen?

Family members are grieving themselves and friends get tired and bored and frequently ask 'are you not over it yet?' like the loss is some kind of flu.

It was Dr. Elizabeth Ross who first documented the stages in the emotional response to grief and loss. Her research for her book *On Death and Dying* was done, mainly in the Columbian Presbyterian Medical Centre, New York. It was in that centre, that Fr. Myles O'Reilly S.J. began working as a chaplain in 1975. He was greatly impressed by the care given to the dying there. On his return to Ireland, in 1982, he initiated a retreat in Milltown Park, titled **Death-A Christian Response**.

It was from this first retreat that the core group of Bethany Bereavement Support Groups was born. The sprawling housing estates and high-rise apartment complexes in the Dublin parishes offered little neighbourly support to grieving 'blow-ins'. This committed group of lay people under the guidance of Fr. John Murphy S. J. decided to address the loneliness and isolation of these grieving people. A training course was designed for volunteers from five parishes. Over the years this course has evolved but the core elements remain and it is obligatory for all members. A new lay ministry of compassionate listening was initiated, which soon acquired equal status with other lay ministries. The name Bethany was chosen because it was here that Jesus offered consolation to the grieving sisters (Jn.11), and here he was given a listening ear (Lk.10). Today, over 90 parishes in the Dublin diocese have a Bethany Bereavement Support Group, which provides the bereaved with an opportunity to talk in confidence to a trained listener.

## BETHANY GOES WEST

In September 2007 Sr. Mary Glennon came to Monkstown

Parish Centre to take part in the Training Course, having been nominated by Frs. Tony King P.P. and Johnny Doherty CSSR (Esker) to undertake the task of establishing Bethany Groups in the West. Little by little the enormity of the task she had undertaken dawned on her. Bethany has a very professional approach to selection, training and formation of members. By becoming a sub group they had agreed to uphold the standards and abide by the guidelines. Sr. Mary had serious questions about translating a city model into rural areas. Esker retreat house seemed the obvious venue for training but could she run a twelve-week course there? Where would she find the people with expertise to deliver aspects of the course outside her areas of specialization. At her age, had she enough energy for promotion and recruitment. She shared her ideas with Frs. Tony and Johnny and it was agreed to form a West of Ireland core group of volunteers interested in promoting Bethany. The enthusiasm and generosity of this group convinced her that the hand of God was in this venture and all would be well. Sr. Mary was chosen as chairperson. This was late November 2007; and she was still in training. In Spring 2008 and the core group decided to conduct the training course over two intensive residential

weekends in Esker Retreat House. This was a major innovation, but the General Executive Council agreed once they were satisfied all aspects of the course could be covered. The essential modules of the course are skills of listening and empathy, self awareness, stages of grief, the grieving process, grief related to the death of a child and death by suicide, coping with loss and change, group facilitation, forgiveness, funeral liturgies, the structures of a Parish group, finance. Talks from people who have coped with a significant bereavement are a feature. Trainees do book reviews and submit self-evaluation forms. The final day is a mini Retreat. Through prayer, reflection, sharing, rituals, symbols and song trainees are invited to face their own bereavement issues particularly any unresolved grief. To date, Sr. Mary and her core group have successfully run 5 training courses in Esker with another pending for the Autumn, 2010. Each of the 12 Bethany Groups is developing at its own pace and offering its unique programme of support.

- One to one support
- Group support
- Telephone contact
- Offer help with the liturgy at the time of death
- Help to organise the Service of Light in November.

*Winnie Keogh*

## BETHANY RESOURCES:

- C.D. 'The Grieving Journey' on which people relate their own loss stories. Some elements of the grieving process and the 'Prayer for the Bereaved' are included. Mary Brady is one of the contributors and tells her story in an abbreviated form. She has written a book 'Time Without You' which includes pictures of paintings she did during the time of her husband's illness.
- C.D. €12 incl. Postage.
- Book €10 incl. Postage
- Or €17 for the two incl. Postage
- These resources will help those who are dealing with loss or who have buried their feelings and wish to begin the process of healing. They can be obtained by sending your full name and address and cheque to: Bethany Bereavement Support Group, G.E.C. (Contact details on page 4).



## Bethany Mount Merrion



*Church of St. Thérèse, Mount Merrion*

At the invitation of the parish priest Fr. Pat McManus and following the normal application and interview procedures, two parishioners undertook the Bethany training course in Monkstown Parish Centre during Autumn 2005. Another two parishioners joined one year later. Since then a few people were approached and invited to consider this ministry, others expressed interest, some applications were made and interviews held, but without any increase in personnel.

Once set up, as advised we have dedicated Bethany telephone numbers and have availed of financial support from the Family Support Agency, Earlsfort Terrace.

We have placed occasional notices in the parish newsletter "Contact".

Two members have since left; two still remain.

Initially the parish secretary supplied a list of the deceased, with names, addresses and telephone numbers of the relatives available for contact. Some six weeks to two months later a letter was sent and possible dates for a visit suggested. A pamphlet and the Bethany prayer were included, and the dedicated Bethany telephone numbers were supplied.

In some cases there was no response. In other cases responses tended to be a phone-call appreciating the letter of condolence and gratefully declining a visit because the bereaved was coping and had ad-

equated support. Sometimes this phone-call, both in content and duration, replaced a visit!

On a number of occasions visits were arranged which seemed to be helpful.

At times we were contacted by an outside party (parish secretary, mutual acquaintance, concerned neighbour or family member, etc.), where "delayed reaction" had set in, and after initially coping well for some time, even one or two years later, grief struck suddenly. A few phone-calls, and in one case a visit, seemed to help.

In one area we recently departed from standard procedure. When the deceased had been a parishioner, but the named person for contact not resident in Mount Merrion, a letter of condolence was sent, with the usual pamphlet, Bethany prayer and included a list of the Bethany Support Groups where support would be available if required.

We still receive the up-to-date lists of deceased from the parish secretary, and make contact with named next-of-kin, after a period of about six weeks to two months later. We attend the AGM, occasional Reflection Days, relevant assemblies; but with two members the field work tends to be intermittent and limited.

Both Bethany members are part of the Parish Funeral Ministry Service, recently set up and this overlap needs careful monitoring.

*Paddy McGinnity*

### News Flashes..... continued

#### The Orlagh Retreat

The Bethany retreat weekend will take place in Orlagh house from the 19th to the 21st of November 2010. Clients and members who have been bereaved for more than 18 months may find this a very healing process. Group funds may be used to pay for those wishing to attend.

#### Making use of your newsletter

Groups wishing to promote a speaker make an announcement or write an article should get in touch with [bethanysupport@eircom.net](mailto:bethanysupport@eircom.net).

#### Making use of your Website

The Bethany website is constantly being updated with information and supportive tips for the successful running of Bethany groups. To reach the site for members, log on to [www.bethany.ie/members](http://www.bethany.ie/members)

### 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 Muiri, Gbnait 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](mailto:bethanysupport@eircom.net)

**Website:** [www.bethany.ie](http://www.bethany.ie)

## 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 above