

# Bethany Bereavement Support Group

## 50th International Eucharistic Congress 2012

The Eucharistic Congress was a very eventful experience for all in Bethany. Taking the stand was a wonderful success in exhibiting our ministry. Bereaved people were supported and there were numerous enquiries from parishes and dioceses at home and abroad who showed a keen interest in what we do. Personally I was extremely impressed with all who vol-

unteered for the stand and the strength of our organisation in rise to the occasion was most encouraging. I extend my appreciation and that of the GEC to all those who volunteered. In particular I thank Liz Ronaldson for the very smooth organising of volunteers.

We move forward with hope and courage to spread our ministry in support of the bereaved.

We know that we are continuing the theme of the Congress 'Communion with Christ and with one Another' in being a listening ear to the bereaved and being a support to them on their grieving journey. Bethany continues to grow and we need many people to support the training of volunteers and development of each person with the skills required for this ministry.



Thank you to all who responded and I hope each person who gave of their time is rewarded and encouraged to continue with this sacred ministry.

**Moira Staines**  
Chairperson

## THE BETHANY STAND AT THE EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

The 31st. Eucharistic Congress was held in Ireland in 1932 from June 21st to June 26th. This was a momentous occasion which saw 100,000 attend mass in the Phoenix Park on the final day.

Modern technology of the day allowed Pope Pius XI to communicate with the communicants through the PA system from his private library in Rome.

Roll forward eighty years to 2012 and The 50th Eucharistic Congress was again being held in Ireland.

The RDS was to be the main focal point of The Congress for the week where Mass

would be celebrated and workshops would take place daily.

There would also be guest speakers daily and exhibition stands open from 9am to 7pm. each day.

It was at one of our monthly meetings of the GEC that a decision was made to "take a stand" in the RDS to celebrate this wonderful occasion.

For this all hands were on deck and my job was to organise the manning of the stand.

A notice had been put in our Spring Newsletter looking for volunteers of which I would need many.

To man the stand for 7 days I needed 9 people a day to cover 3 shifts. So many people volunteered that I made a rota out so that each person would at some stage get to work on the stand.

They came from all over the country and distance was no problem to them. The only problem that arose was that we were only given 3 Exhibition tags so it was with great precision that as people finished their shift a call would be made to the next group of volunteers waiting outside the RDS and the ceremonial passing over of the tags would take place. This was carried out brilliantly by all



*Volunteers at the Bethany stand*

volunteers. Each evening we made sure the last shift would liaise with the morning shift for the handing over of badges. Again I need not have worried as they all stepped up to the mark.

The stand was very busy all week and we met wonderful people, some needing the listening ear of Bethany, others wanting to become a listening ear. One lady from New York who trains people in her parish in Bereavement support very kindly sent me her 8 weekly training modules which I have passed on to Fr. Myles.

We had various hand-outs and information leaflets and we

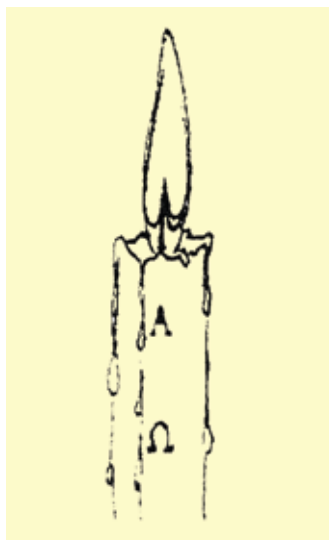
also had for sale Mary Brady's book, *The Bethany Journey Book* (updated version) and Sr. Shiela's Prayer cards.

We took many names for our training courses and the weekend retreat in Orlagh.

All in all the week went wonderfully well and I think many people were uplifted by the warmth of those they met and the good will feeling of those around them.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers for the work they did in making my job so easy and so enjoyable. God Bless.

**Liz Ronaldson**



# Interview with Winnie Keogh

**Q. Winnie what first drew you to Bethany and when and where did you train?**

My mother died in 1978 and my father in 1980. We had five children and I was very busy. About 8yrs later a bereaved lady asked the then P.P. if she could start a Bethany Group. I went along to the meeting in her house and some shared their stories. I found it extremely difficult and was very upset. In the autumn of 1986 the lady who initiated Bethany was offered training with the Bereavement Counselling Services, which she accepted and the rest of the group attended a course in the Adult Education Centre, Mountjoy Sq. for six weeks. There were no interviews, no forms, no practical help to set up a group and no cert. However I do remember having my hands anointed with oil on the last day. During these years my understanding of the faith had grown and matured as I re read the old and New Testament books. I felt

drawn to the service of others. I was asked to be the leader and in Jan of 1987 we were commissioned in our parish church and the Ballyroan Bethany Bereavement Support Group began its ministry. We met in the local library once a month and when Bethany sympathy cards were introduced in 1993/4, we also visited the bereaved.

**Q. It was a different organisation then. Those were different times?**

The ethos of supporting the bereaved was the same as it is today, but the structure evolved slowly. Finance was a problem as the only income was from the parishes in payment for training the volunteers. When changes were proposed, some G.E.C. members did not always accept them. The Day of Reflection held in honour of Fr. John Murphy and the A. G. M. were times when we came together and lots of new ideas were exchanged and implemented. Gradually new rules were implemented and trainees were interviewed, as was usual

in other organisations, extra sessions were added to the course and it was streamlined under the guidance of Sr. Shelia and the training team.

**Q. Who were your greatest inspirations, then and since?**

Without a doubt Mairead Allen, the 2nd Sec. She had a great awareness of and empathy for the needs of the bereaved and was always concerned about the future of Bethany.

The organisation has been blessed with dedicated and committed people like David Walsh, Richard Cummins, Alice O'Grady Walsh, John Magannety and Frank O' Hara who took on the role of chairman after John died suddenly. Fr. Myles, who has been with Bethany since 1982 has been inspirational.

**Q. What development of Bethany are you proudest of, like most?**

I could never understand why other Dioceses in the country hadn't picked up on the ministry we were offering to the bereaved in Dublin, so I'm really delighted that the time has come and Bethany is now in Northern Ireland, the West of Ireland and soon to be established in the South.

**Q. You have shown over the years that you have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the people and activities of Bethany. How did you find the time and energy to do so much for so long?**

The Lord has blessed me with good health and an understanding husband! Not having a day job also helped. Being involved with all the training courses up until lately and getting to know people over the 12 weeks was wonderful. Helping to promote Bethany in the parishes and assisting new groups to get started was very rewarding.

**Q. As you go through your final year on the GEC what are your dreams and goals for Bethany?**

I feel a Bethany Group has a



Winnie Keogh

great advantage by being able to offer group support and by being a local parish based community outreach ministry. We know our community, we meet them in the shops and on the street and some of us are engaged in funeral ministry, which is also a great advantage when it comes to supporting the bereaved at a later date. My dream is to see a Bethany / funeral ministry group in every parish in the country.

**Q. The members may wish to read of your experiences as chairperson of this organisation. Would you like to describe your role? In what ways was it rewarding? How challenging was it?**

My role was to chair the G.E.C. monthly meeting, plan for the year and listen to suggestions.

I was very lucky to have Sr. Marion Reynolds on the G.E.C. when I was elected Chairperson. It has been a very busy three years. Bethany was established in West of Irl and in the North. The constitution was revised and printed in book form. Mary Brady was asked to review and update the 'Bethany Journey' book, which will be launched in the autumn. It was very rewarding to work with and be supported by an excellent team. I thank them all from the bottom of my heart and I know that Bethany will continue to prosper under their guidance.

The BETHANY JOURNEY



Revised by  
MARY BRADY

**Training Development Day followed by Book Launch 'The Bethany Journey' revised by Mary Brady. Celebrating 30 years on the Journey 20th October 2012 commencing at 9.30 Milltown Institute, Milltown Park, Sandford Road, Ranelagh, Dublin. 6 - early booking advisable as places are limited.**

**Email: mastaines@hotmail.com Text: 087 2345432**

## Our Guests from Uganda

During the recent Eucharistic Congress, we had the privilege of having two fine young priests from Uganda staying with us – Fr. Romanus Etwap and Fr. Matthias Kalemba. As soon as I heard they were coming, I wondered what to give them to eat, how would they cope with our strange food. I needn't have worried. They assured me that they had been told to have a "Missionary Stomach" i.e. to eat whatever was put in front of them!

During our many meals together, we learnt of their life in Uganda. Fr. Romanus is a parish priest covering many remote villages with no running water or electricity. Fr. Matthias, who is only two years ordained, works as a curate in a very busy parish not far from Kampala. Both face huge challenges on a daily basis – lack of resources, poverty, illness and a congregation suffering huge bereavement and loss through war and Aids. However, they both exuded joy and hope based on a rock-solid faith in God. They demonstrated how a truly "priestly" priest lives his daily faith. They were up early to pray before breakfast, were eager to hear confessions at the Congress and spent some time each day in the Prayer Space adoring the Blessed Eucharist. Our first job as hosts was to

introduce them to our transport system. Fr. Matthias had never been on a train so I traveled with them on the Dart, explaining direction and where to get off. They were greeted with smiles and help from volunteers at Sandymount station. However, what turned out to be their greatest surprise at the Congress was our Army and Gardaí. They were very nervous when they saw soldiers outside the Army Chaplaincy tents in Simonscourt. In Uganda soldiers mean trouble – you keep away from them at all costs. However, at the Congress they discovered friendly Irish soldiers who explained how our soldiers are looked after when working for the UN – how they are supported, spiritually and physically, when suffering from fighting, bereavement and loss. On the night of the Eucharistic procession, attended by thousands, they came home and asked us did we realize our police prayed! They were astounded that the Gardaí along the route of the procession were joining in the prayers and hymn singing. As they left us, they gave us a copy of the book "African Holocaust" – the story of the Uganda Martyrs. It was clear that they were both inspired by the courage of these martyrs.

We feel very well rewarded for the joy of opening our home to these wonderful people.

## July Meeting of Trainers



A historic meeting took place on 26th July 2012 with trainers gathered from North, South, East and West.

Claire and Liam Dowds travelled from Northern Ireland where Bethany is now established in 12 parishes

Geraldine Buckley came from Charleville and is set to commence the first training course in the Cork region in September. We wish Geraldine every success and support.

Sr Mary Glennon travelled from Esker where Bethany is strongly established in the West and is now in 18 parishes. Gobnait O Grady and Richard Lowry represented

our Dublin trainers together with members from their support teams Anne Butler, Liz Ronaldson and Carmel Roberts.

Moira Staines chaired the meeting with Fr Myles O'Reilly and Winnie Keogh representing the GEC.

Gratitude is extended to all our trainers and support teams, including those who were unable to attend, Ray Leonard, Anne Meade and Maura Byrne, for their dedication and commitment to the onerous task of training and the developing of our members and the extension of Bethany throughout the provinces.

## News Flashes.....

### Exploring Death and Loss of Our Loved Ones

Residential weekend at Orlagh Retreat centre Old Court Road, Firhouse, Dublin 16 - Friday 23 November 2012 @ 7.30pm to Sunday 25th @ 4.30pm

**Monkstown Basic Training Course** - Interviews Thursday 13th September 2012 @ 6.30 pm and Saturday 15th @ 10.30am. 12 weeks commencing 20th September @ 7.30pm each Thursday to final day Saturday 1st December 2012 Contact Liz Ronaldson 0872392465

**Esker over 2 weekends** Oct 5th - 7th and November 16th - 18th. Contact Sr. Mary Glennon 091 876640 or 087 3204569

**Northern Ireland** 29th September to 15th December 2012 - contact Claire Dowds 00442890492777 cdowds181@gmail.com

**Mallow** - 19th September to 1st December contact Geraldine Buckley 085 1683618

### General Executive Committee 2012

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

Moira Staines - **Chairperson**

Deirdre O Muiri - **Secretary**

Anne Butler - **Treasurer**

Winnie Keogh - **Ex Officio**

Ronan Hughes, Gobnait O Grady, Maeve Mason,

Brendan Nugent, Jim Garland,

Liz Ronaldson.

### Bethany Bereavement Support Group contact details:

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

# The death of a daughter

*Dare to reach out your hand into the darkness, to pull another hand into the light." - Norman Rice*

To really understand the intensity of the grief that follows the death of a child you sadly have to be a bereaved parent. In 2004 every parent's worst nightmare visited our family. Out of the blue, my youngest daughter Rachel was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour. There was nothing the medics could do for her. She was just 5 years old and loved life. After 145 precious days our beautiful daughter died at home with her family.

Nothing could have prepared our family for the devastation that descended upon us. It was like a bomb had exploded and the world we had known was gone forever. The sadness was unrelenting and every hour, every day, every week, every month there were painful reminders, the vacant space at the table, the empty bed at night and the absence of her voice around us.

The death of a child of any age is against every rule of nature. Children are supposed to bury their parents not the other way around. I don't think there is a darker place on this planet than standing at the grave of your child.

When Rachel died the intensity of the grief in our home was palpable. Each member of the family was grieving in their own way. Rachel's brother and sister had not only lost their little sister, their Mum and Dad had been replaced by these two heartbroken individuals each trying to cope in different ways and at times not coping at all.

At times I thought I was losing my mind. When you experience the death of your child you not only experience the huge void of not having them with you in everyday life, you also lose the future, the dreams you had for them,

all the milestones you thought they would make.

My grief affected me both emotionally and physically. Simple everyday tasks became insurmountable. I had no energy and was tired all the time yet could not sleep. I was so lonely for Rachel. Every moment of every day I thought about her. Even in a room full of family and friends I felt lonely. All I wanted was my precious daughter back and life to go back to the way it was before she was sick. Words cannot describe the feelings of despair and isolation I felt at that time.

The only relief in that first year after Rachel died was when we were invited to a bereavement event. This was the first time we met other parents who were also trying to find ways to cope with the death of their child. For the first time we felt we are not alone in this nightmare.

It was after another bereavement event that a group of parents continued to meet casually for a cup of coffee and a chat once a month.

For the majority of us these meetings were the only time we ventured out socially. They offered a little respite and somewhere we could let our mask slip and not have to worry about protecting family or friends from the depth of our heartbreak, despair and loneliness. More importantly, we could talk openly about our grief. No one judged us on our actions or thoughts. We had become each other's Anam Cara.

In 2006/2007, through word of mouth, our numbers increased. Parents started travelling from all over Ireland to connect with other bereaved parents. It was not the differences of our losses that we identified with and related to, it was the similarities. What we discovered was that there is no easy way to experience

the death of your child. Some of us had experienced the death of a young child due to serious illness. Others had experienced the unexpected death of an older child through sudden adult death, road traffic collision, suicide, drug related death. Sadly, because those deaths happen suddenly outside a hospital or hospice system the parents and families often fall outside the realms of any bereavement support.

In particular, we found this casual gathering provided a safe place where our experiences of loss could be normalised. That, in turn, took away the isolation we were feeling and allowed us to put our story in context. It was of some comfort to be in the company of others who understood the massive impact the death of a child has on a parent/family.

In that initial Anam Cara group what was evident was how vulnerable we were, how our grief lasts far longer than society recognises. Yet, together we gave each other strength to take that next step, to face into the next milestone. Parents a little further on in their journey gave newly bereaved parents some hope that they could make that marker and in time find a 'new normal', a way to live their

lives around their grief. What we learned as Mums and Dads is that although we don't have our child with us physically, the strength of the love we shared continues. Not even death can break the strong bond between a parent and their child.

This year our family is 8 years on our journey, Rachel's life and death has taught us many lessons.... the importance of living life to the full, the kindness of strangers and the need to grab happiness when you can.

I still miss her everyday and often wonder what she would be like now if she was alive. I have found my new normal life and have experienced happiness and joy again, something I thought I had lost forever.

I still have occasional sad days which could be triggered by a particular milestone. This year Rachel would have been 13 years old, a feisty teenager. However, unlike the early years when those sad days were a constant, I now welcome them as they remind me that our bond and love is still as strong as ever and I will carry her in my heart always.

*Sharon Vard*

## **Anam Cara – Soul Friend.**

For more information about Anam Cara and our services visit us at: [www.anamcara.ie](http://www.anamcara.ie) or contact us on Office Number **01 4045378**

Email: [info@anamcara.ie](mailto:info@anamcara.ie)

Anam Cara National Awareness Day 2nd November 2012 ... We would really appreciate your support.

If you want to volunteer at our Anam Cara Parent Groups please contact Sharon on **087 9637790**

