



BETHANY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP

A Grandmother's loss of her Grandchild

This is Margaret's Story

Margaret lost her grandson Ryan on 20th Jan 2011. He was 4 years of age at the time with one brother 8 years old. He had been diagnosed on Christmas Eve 2009 with a neuroblastoma a rare childhood cancer. He commenced chemotherapy on Dec.26th. The family were told at the outset that the cancer was very aggressive but they persevered with chemo, surgery, stem-cell treatment all through 2010. Sadly, Ryan died barely 13 months after the diagnoses. Margaret had already experienced the loss of a niece age 30 months in 1995 and was all too aware of the severe forms of treatment and the devastation of the loss despite every possible medical effort. She had already experienced the trauma of watching a beloved small child undergo severe and painful procedures. With great honesty and courage she shared her feelings at the time of Ryan's death and in the following months.

Early Months

"As a grandmother my grief was twofold—firstly the dreadful loss of my 4 year old grandson and also for the pain my son was going through. No one expects to outlive their children never mind their grandchildren. That was one of the hardest things to come to terms with. In the first few weeks the pain of the loss was so intense that I felt that it would engulf me and that I would never find my way out again. I did spend a lot of time with my son and his partner and I wanted to help them as much as I could in whatever way they needed. Sometimes I had to just think of the next hour and of what I needed to do in that hour."

Later months

"When the time came for me to step back from my son's immediate family and allow them deal with their own grief that's when I was left to come to terms myself with all that had happened. As the shock and numbness began to fade



the real grieving started. It was hard to be around people who had no idea of how I felt. People were kind and concerned mainly about Ryans parents but there was always the feeling of—what about me? It was such a lonely place, the world just kept going and I wanted to scream and shout—do you know what has happened to me? There is no outlet for grandparents, no specific group to go to for support so somehow you do your best to put your life back together again. It was a struggle but my one saving grace was my two other grandchildren. I spent as much time as I could in their company and gradually it became easier to be around other people. I attended a 5 week course on grieving which helped a lot".

Conclusion

Margaret has described her feelings so well. She was particularly close to Ryan as she had always had him for weekends and she shared a great deal of his care - and visited

him daily at the hospital and at his home. She rejoiced in his wonderful experiences—Police helicopter ride, driving the Dart, Mascot for football and rugby matches, visit to Tom's land in U.K. etc. Her story mirrors exactly the journey so many grieving spouses, parents and children undergo. Because Ryan was diagnosed one Christmas Eve and died shortly after the following one, it is always a particularly sad time for her. Her tree has one section devoted to him, he was part of her life and will always remain so.

An additional grief for her is that her son and his partner are no longer together but she is happy that Ryan's older brother is in his final year of school, and appears to be coping with his life. We are very grateful to her for being so forthcoming and wish her fulfilment in her life. Maybe in the future Bethany may consider a special meeting devoted to grandparents.



*A group photo on the final day of training in Clonliffe College
16th May 2014*

Tree of Hope Firhouse in solidarity with the bereaved

While Noel McEvoy from the Firhouse Bethany Bereavement Support Group was in conversation with Councillor Brian Lawlor, the idea of a tree of hope for the bereaved emerged.

Brian put him in touch with Noeleen Fulham who was planting trees of hope in various areas in Tallaght in solidarity with those bereaved by suicide.

We decided as a group to plant this tree in the park adjoining the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Firhouse in solidarity with bereaved families. Fr Peter Reilly PP gave us great support for this project, and the decision was taken to plant the tree following 6pm Mass on Saturday 24th May, 2014.

Among those who attended the event was Moira Staines, chairperson of Bethany, Nuala Casey from Kilmacud Bethany, Maria Peelo from Pieta House, Lucan and many parishioners who had read the notice about it.

Having planted the tree Noeleen, with assistance from her colleague, Phil Stubb, put yellow ribbons on the tree, and expressed the hope

that the tree would give hope to all families bereaved by suicide and indeed to all who suffered loss in tragic circumstances. Noeleen also expressed a wish that yellow ribbons would be put on the tree on 10th September each year to mark National Suicide day. Fr Reilly blessed the tree and prayers were said.

A plaque was made and donated by parishioner, Pat Bourke, Fanagans Undertakers, Tallaght, offered to inscribe the plaque free of charge, and the local SuperValu donated bedding plants for around the base of the tree.

Some exit this life much earlier than others, and some in tragic circumstances, and while research has shown that when a person has a significant bereavement life is never the same again, it has also shown that people have resilience, and with proper support they can grow around their grief.

We hope that as this tree grows so will your strength to cope with your loss grow. Healing can take place when people talk with one another about their loss as was experienced when a girl who had lost a brother through suicide met up with a



Noeleen, Noel, Austin and Olive planting the tree

teacher who had taught her in Primary School and both found the meeting a very healing occasion.

Our prayers were answered for the planting regarding the weather DG and following

the ceremony people were invited to partake in refreshments which were served by the members of the hospitality group in Firhouse Parish.

Olive Galvin



Austin and Noel with Fr. Peter Reilly blessing the tree.

Compulsory

Training on Child Protection

for All Bethany Members

Venue: Clonliffe College

Saturday 4th October 2014

10.00am to 3.00pm

Registration 9.30am

As Bethany Bereavement Support is a Parish Based Ministry it is imperative that all Bethany volunteers undertake this workshop being provided by the diocese.

Please confirm numbers attending by

30th September 2014

by **Texting 087 9905299** or

Email: bethanysupport@eircom.net.

Bethany reaches out to Moyross in Limerick

There is no Bethany Bereavement Support Group serving the people of Moyross Parish – a community that has had more than its fair share of grief as explained by its PP Fr. Tony O’Riordan S.J.: **“I have come across few communities that has had as much grief to bear as Moyross. Added to the normal pattern of living and dying, there have been a number of its people murdered and also an unusually high number of young people died in tragic situations.”**

Last Spring, Fr. Myles O’Reilly S.J., our Bethany Chaplain, was invited by Fr. Tony to facilitate a 2-day Bereavement Workshop for a group of parish workers. He gladly accepted the invitation and decided to invite Nuala Casey to accompany him. Nuala is an experienced Bethany-trained worker who nine years ago experienced the tragic loss of her son Craig. Together they prepared a workshop designed to help the bereaved people of Moyross deal with their deep-seated grief.

I recently met Nuala to hear about her Moyross experience. She remarked that like many of us, her knowledge of Moyross was coloured by negative media reports. However, on arrival she was pleasantly surprised by the positive atmosphere and the warm welcome that awaited herself and Fr. Myles. Even though they had never met before, those they worked with reported that they felt an immediate deep connection with both herself and Fr. Myles when she shared her story of tragic loss.

The small group who attended the Workshop was made up of Community Workers and Community Companions. At first, they brought the participants through what is commonly known as the Stages of Grief. However the memorable moment of connection was when Nuala told her own story of loss by suicide. As she

told her story with honesty and compassion, she created a safe space that enabled the group to begin to share their memories and personal stories. This led to a discussion of how the normal emotions of grieving i.e. shock, denial, loneliness, depression, anger and guilt, are intensified and become almost unbearable when the death of our loved one is by suicide.

On their second day, they explored the key steps to recovery culminating in a session on Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

The feedback was so positive that Fr. Tony invited Nuala to return in June to be one of the keynote speakers at their annual parish Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Here Nuala found herself telling her story not only to the congregation in the Church, but also to several other groups. For example, she was asked to speak to a group of teenagers, telling about her son’s tragic death, and the devastating effects it had on his family and friends. She encouraged them to share their feelings with their friends, talk about their fears and seek help if necessary.

Informally, she also met the school Principal and some local teachers as well as members of the Knitting and Craft club. To all she described how her local Bethany Bereavement Support Group helped her along the path from loss to recovery. Many of her listeners approached her to talk privately so she met them for one-to-one sessions both formally and informally. When finally it was time for her to catch her train home to Dublin, she felt elated as she could see that what she had to say had helped many people cope with their grief and loss.

A few weeks later Fr. Tony sent the following observations of their intervention: **“Myles and Nuala have gifts which can unlock the knots that can come into the grieving process and lead to very complicated and stalled bereavements.**

Nuala’s power is in her story and the simple and tender ways she tells what happened to her when her two sons died. She can say far better and in a way people can hear, that the pain of loss can in time be overcome and that it need not forever define your life”.

What happens next?

So where do we go from here? As I said at the start of this article, there is no Bethany Bereavement Support presence in Moyross or indeed in Limerick City or County. Nuala and Fr.

Myles are hoping to bring the Bethany Team to Moyross in order to offer the residents an experience of the Bethany Weekend to help them come to terms with grief and loss from a Christian perspective. This might further stimulate and encourage them to form their own Bethany Bereavement Support Group and thus lead the way to reaching out, not only to their own bereaved, but also to the bereaved of their City and County.

Gobnait O’Grady

Dates for the Diary....

Next Training Workshops

St. Patrick’s Hall, Monkstown

Thursday 25th September to 4th December 2014,

7.30pm - 9.30pm

Full day **Saturday 29th November**

Interviews **18th September 6.30pm - 8.30pm**

Further details from Liz Ronaldson

Email: ronaldson6@eircom.net or Mobile: 087 2392465

Northern Ireland Training Dates

Venue: Kiltegan Centre in Castlewellingan, Co. Down.

Commencing **Thursday 25th September** until the Final Day on **Saturday 13th December.**

Contact: Claire Dowds Tel: 0044 7766934246.

Email: cdowds181@gmail.com

Galway - Esker Retreat Centre

3rd-5th October and 7th - 9th November

Contact: Sr. Mary Glennon 0873204569

Email: mbglennon@eircom.net for further information.

Facilitation Training by Richard Lowry

Sat 18th October - 10.00am to 3.00 pm registration 9.30.

Contact: Bethany mobile 087 9905299 or

bethanysupport@eircom.net

Coping with Loss - a talk by Brid Carroll,

Venue: Fitzpatrick Castle Hotel, Killiney,

Wednesday 22nd October 2014 at 8.00 pm

Irish Hospice Foundation

Information Evening for the Public about Bereavement

Thursday 6th November 2014

Venue: Alexander Hotel Dublin 2.

5.30pm to 8.30pm.

Guest Speaker **Michael Harding**

Orlagh weekend: 21st - 23rd November

Please contact Anne Butler for booking and further information

Tel: 087 2050514

Email: annbutler@live.ie

My Day of Reflection 26th April 2014

On Saturday 26th April, 2014, a day of reflection entitled 'Inspiration from the Mystics' was held in Clonliffe College hosted by the Bethany Bereavement Support Group GEC.

Fr. Brendan Comerford SJ directed the day, and spoke on two of the great Mystics, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Julian of Norwich. In the morning he spoke of the young German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer (+1945) a theologian, and active in the German resistance to the policies of Hitler and Nazism. For his opposition to the Nazi regime, Bonhoeffer was ultimately arrested and executed at Flossen concentration camp, during the last month of the war. He remains an important symbol of opposition to Hitler, and his views on Christianity increasingly influential.

In the afternoon, Fr Comerford spoke of the comfort and hope of the famous English medieval Mystic, Julian of Norwich (+1416). Julian's message is one of great consolation in the midst of life's trials, temptations and seeming failures.

The following is the thoughts and memories of the day as experienced by Kay Murray

a member of the Blessington Bethany group.

Although I was interested on the day in all that Fr. Comerford told us about Bonhoeffer I felt a longing on me for the morning tea break time. Out in the corridor having that very welcome cup of tea and biscuits I began to feel sad. My husband died suddenly exactly four months earlier and although we were divorced for many years we had managed to stay good friends. I was grieving the loss of him. I tried to control the flow of tears trying to find their way out of my eyes. A member of the group whom I had never met before started to chat to me. She didn't know I was struggling to settle myself down. Another lady who had trained with me on the Bethany course last year joined us. I wanted to hold those tears back but they seemed to have a mind of their own. I thought about heading home there and then and not going back inside after the teabreak.

I apologised to the two women and explained to them what was going on inside me. Both ladies were extremely understanding and in true Bethany style gave support, understanding and kindness to me right there in the corridor during the

short tea break. With teary embarrassment I apologised again and thanked them to which one of the ladies made the comment "isn't that what we are about in Bethany." Just being able to voice my inner struggle to understanding ears strengthened me enough to return to the room.

The most amazing feeling came over me during the day when Fr. Comerford showed an image on the overhead projector of three prisoners of war. Something about the photo touched me deeply that day. It may have just been a trick of the light but it gave me a sense of the light of the Holy Spirit, an amazingly bright light in the midst of all the dark horror and suffering within the wire bound camp. I also knew that the Holy Spirit was within me and would always be present to me as I continue my journey on this earth.

From the many quotes of Julian of Norwich an anchoress in the Parish Church of St. Julian, Norfolk who received 16 different mystical revelations I give you just one quote to ponder on:

"All shall be well and all shall

be well and all manner of things shall be well."

I read somewhere that *we don't always remember what a person says, we don't always remember what a person does, but we always remember how a person makes us feel.* The understanding and the kindness of the two ladies I shared the tea break with helped me to feel understood, empowered, accepted and calm and as a result I enjoyed the remainder of the day. The information from Fr. Brendan Comerford about the life and times of Bonhoeffer made me feel gratitude for all that is good in my own life and inspires me to be more aware of the needs of others. The bequests and revelations of Julian of Norwich which Fr. Comerford spoke of will be an on line lookup and study for me in the weeks ahead. My grateful thanks to Bethany for the Day of Reflection 2014 and for the opportunity to write my own reflections. Thanks also to Fr. Brendan for his very well planned and informative presentation. God bless all who read this.



Richard Lowry who was the trainer at the last training course in May 2014 with Moira Staines

General Executive Committee 2014

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

Moira Staines - **Chairperson**

Maeve Mason - **Secretary**

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Catherine Dunnion.

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