

Grieving in Place (Dianne Kieren, Written for the CARE ABT SYNOD Ministry Team May, 2020)

One evening a few years ago we had a phone call from our former neighbor's daughter informing us that our friend had died unexpectedly during a regular surgery procedure. At her request no service would be held. We were shocked by her death and more so lost in our grief because we would not be able to comfort her family, listen to the many stories of her life, and receive the benefit of the social and spiritual messages that help us deal with grief.

We have a deeply human need to gather with other people to console each other, to make sense of death, to help us make decisions about moving on and handling the inevitabilities of death. Our grief practices and religious rituals provide us with the opportunities to revisit the joys and sorrows of life together with the deceased, the messages of comfort found in scripture, and these help us begin the healing process. Without a funeral or memorial service or another opportunity to gather together, we were left to grieve in place.

Grief traditions have had to evolve many times in the past. Over time, grieving practices have had to change due to things such as plagues, including the bubonic plague, and social upheavals such as the massacres in Cambodia. Washing the deceased person's body, kissing the deceased, singing prayers over the body were not permitted. New practices in society and new rituals within the church were needed. Retroactive funeral blessings were given months and even years later, rituals allowing items belonging to the deceased to stand in for their presence were just a few of the changes that evolved. Today, Facebook and other online memorials, live-streamed funerals also offer ways that individual losses can be shared as a communal event.

The corona pandemic experience has again challenged our grieving traditions even further than the personal requests not to have a funeral service. We are asked not to gather in large groups for religious services, attend wakes, or even have close contact with those of our friends and family who are experiencing grief. Today our grief traditions of surrounding the grieving family and friends with food, personal contact and hugs, and attending the religious services that provide us with some sense of closure and hope in the face of death are no longer offered to us in the way that we have always expected. We are left to "grieve in place" and to develop new ways of helping ourselves and our family and friends receive support and care at very difficult time.

Many people ask, how can we grieve in place and how might we help friends and family who are grieving receive the love and support needed at this time? There are many ideas we might use to provide support during these difficult times. Here are a few and you may wish to add to the list yourself.

Make Prayer a Central Feature

Inform the person who is grieving that you are including them in your daily prayers. You might also invite a group of friends to pray together at a certain time. The Bishop of our Synod has invited people to Light One Candle and pray at 10 am each day during the

pandemic. Some of these shared prayers are available on the synod website. Such a prayer circle can offer a powerful message to someone who is grieving. Our prayers help us feel calm and brave and know that we are not alone. When we pray, we are physically alone but together with the power of the love and comfort of the Saviour.

The ELCA has a blog article which is also very helpful on **Daily Prayer in the Home** (<https://blogs.elca.org/worship/2044/>).

Some suggested Prayers

Grieving a Death

"Compassionate God, give courage and faith to all those who mourn, that they may have the strength to meet the days ahead with steadfastness and patience; not as those who are without hope, but in thankful remembrance of your great goodness, and in the joyful expectation of eternal life in your presence, with those they love; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord." (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* - Pastoral Care - page 278)

Eternal God, your love is stronger than death, and your passion more fierce than the grave. We rejoice in the lives of those whom you have drawn into your eternal embrace. Keep us in joyful communion with them until we join the saints of every people and nation gathered before your throne in your ceaseless praise, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* additional prayers, p. 82)

Almighty God, your love never fails, and you can turn the shadow of death into daybreak. Help us to receive your word with believing hearts, so that, confident in your promises, we may have hope and be lifted out of sorrow into the joy and peace of our presence; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 84)

Lord Christ, you came into the world as one of us, and suffered as we do. As we go through the trials of life, help us to realize that you are with us at all times and in all things; that we have no secrets from you; and that your loving grace enfolds us for eternity. In the security of your embrace we pray. Amen (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 84)

Almighty God, source of all mercy and giver of comfort, graciously tend those who mourn, that, casting all their sorrow on you, they may know the consolation of your love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* funeral service)

Prayers during the Pandemic

"Look down on us in our hour of need. Give strength to the healthy and relief to the sick. Help us to comfort the frightened and the vulnerable, to stay calm in the midst of fear and anger and to do our part to fight this plague. Be with us, come what may, until this too, passes into history." (J. M Opal, Globe and Mail, March 23, 2020)

Dear Lord,

When my heart and body grieve the loss of routine and human interaction, your love and hope surround me with comfort and stills my anxiety. Be with us all and help us do our part to fight this plague. Dr. Dianne Kieren, Chair, CARE Ministry Team, Hosanna

Gracious God, none who trust in your Son can be separated from your love. Give to those who live alone peace and contentment in their solitude, hope and fulfillment in their love of you, and joy and companionship in their relations with others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Additional prayers, p. 83)

Merciful God, your healing power is everywhere about us. Strengthen those who work among the sick; give them courage and confidence in all they do. Encourage them when their efforts seem futile or when death prevails. Increase their trust in your power even to overcome death and pain and crying. May they be thankful for every sign of health you give, and humble before the mystery of your healing grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 85)

Share Meaningful Bible verses

The Bible offers many different messages that comfort us in times of difficulty. When we console someone, we might share a favorite Bible verse that has helped us deal with grief. Send the verse but also send the meaning it has for you and how this verse helps you celebrate the memory of the person you grieve for.

"Lord, now let your servant go in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation." (Luke 2:29)

Psalm 23

Comforting Bible Verses for Death

- Philippians 4:13
- Revelations 21:4
- Romans 8:18
- Psalms 34:18
- Mathew 11:28-30
- Psalm 147: 3
- Matthew5:1-3
- Psalm 73:26
- 1 Thessalonians4:13-18
- Joshua 1:9
- Matthew 5:4
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-17
- 1 Corinthians 15:26

Share Remembrance photos and stories

Often funerals and other grieving traditions allow us to share memories and stories of a life well lived or experiences that we will miss and treasure. These memories are often positive and uplifting. They may also give us a reason to smile and reflect positively on the life of the person we have lost and who has meant something special to us.

Take time to send a favorite photo of the person who has died and along with it a story of how that photo provides you with a sense of celebration for a life well lived.

Include music in your remembrances

Sometimes it isn't a photo but rather sharing a song or piece of music that you have remembered as one you will keep in your memory about the person. Grieving and celebrating a life go on for many years after the person's death. Music is such a strong part of our lives and our memories it deserves to be part of our grieving in place.

Listening to favorite pieces of music may be a strong element of comforting us in times of difficulty and we need to let this music surround us with the same feelings we had when we shared the music with the loved one.

Some hymns that could be supportive in grieving in place include ones that we rarely need a hymnal to sing.

These include:

Sweet Hour of Prayer

Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling

Amazing Grace

Rock of Ages

I Know that My Redeemer Lives

Jesus Loves Me

God Be With You till we Meet Again

A favorite verse of a hymn may also stand out as one example of something to share with a person experiencing the death of a loved one:

“When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain, Your touch can call us back to life again. Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been; Love is come again like wheat arising green” from Now the Green Blade Rises, Text: John Crum.

Write Down Some of your Feelings to Share with Others

Some of us are gifted as poets and writers but others are more spontaneous in their writings. We don't need to be a writer or poet to share our feelings with someone who is grieving. Someone who writes to another that they are sending a hug, or a wish for a better day, or an additional source of energy or hope or comfort is sending an additional source of love to a grieving person.

Make your greeting more personal than the standard “I am thinking of you “... For example, I am thinking of you and especially the many times we shared with you in our summers together. I am sending my love and my wish for a better day tomorrow.

Invite children who know the person to draw a picture or write a message about the person.

Phone, email, mail, or text regular messages of support and hope. Make a regular date on your calendar for contact with a person who is grieving.

Plan to continue to send messages to the grieving person long after the sympathy cards have been received. These contacts are daily reminders that you are thinking of them and including them in your daily considerations.

Inquire how you might help them deal with the formal requirements of handling a death

There are so many formal requirements after a death. Ask the person what you might be able to do to help them complete these requirements under social isolation conditions. For some people, it might be obtaining the information that is necessary to complete government forms. For others it might be informing a group of friends who may not be aware of the death. You might also inquire how you might help them plan a remembrance event once the pandemic allows gatherings.

Share some self-care practices

Grieving takes a toll on our energy and mental health. Self-care becomes an essential part of coping with the stress and demands of loss. Good friends can encourage and suggest self-care practices for someone who is grieving a loss. Some ideas for persons grieving during isolation are to take a walk, get enough rest, delegate tasks that others can do, set boundaries, encourage seeking professional help if the person feels overwhelmed. Many agencies are offering online counseling and support. As a friend you might research possible online support groups. Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries (sanctuarymentalhealth.org) has just released a four series online resource on grief.

Help People Make Ritual at Home After a Death

Elaine Ramshaw, an ELCA laywoman and author of a book on ritual, has written a very helpful article on how to create home ritual when there isn't any church based ritual immediately available, or when a service is held but mourners aren't allowed to attend (<https://blogs.elca.org/worship/2013/>) . She suggests three simple ritual activities that could help mourners symbolized their loss: holding a simple at home memorial service for a small group or virtually, inviting people to write a letter to the person who died saying the things they wished they had been able to share, and finding two physical symbols of the deceased, one the mourner wants to keep and one he or she is willing to give up. One of the objects is given up by tearing it up, burning it or burying in an action shared with a prayer or song. The second object is placed in a place of honor in the home or worn. These home rituals are not a replacement for church rituals but rather another way to say goodbye to the deceased person and begin to move on.

Perhaps today as we too experience the isolation created by the pandemic, and we grieve the losses that such isolation and social distancing has created, may we become more sensitive to those who live in isolation on a daily basis. We may then become more responsive to generating a continual and strong effort for community support. One author suggested: "Perhaps in rethinking communal mourning, we can remake the world into one that's more welcoming for all of us." (Globe and Mail, Opinion, Ashes to Ashes. Adjust Adjust. Brandy Schillace, March 23, 2020)